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COVER PHOTO: GULL-BILLED TERN BY DANIELE OCCHIATO (WWW.AGAMI.NL)

Contents

CASPIAN TERN BY ROBIN CHITTENDEN

THE 'summer lull', as we have traditionally referred to it at BirdGuides, covers a few weeks from mid-June until mid-July when the volume of bird news shrinks to a minimum. It's bang in the middle of the breeding season and was always a spell where the news team would put its proverbial feet up and enjoy some relative downtime ahead of the protracted and busy autumn season.

Yet that lull seems to have barely happened in 2023, in part due to an exceptionally late spring. Inhibited by constant north-easterly winds and cool conditions, spring passage for many species was delayed, in some cases by weeks, and we were receiving plenty of reports of northbound migrants as diverse as Sanderling, Black Tern and Red-backed Shrike well into June, while concurrently the first Green Sandpipers were already winging their way south.

This rather confused state of affairs hopefully doesn't hint at anything more sinister and we can anticipate these birds enjoying a successful (if belated) breeding season.

July can be a quiet month, of course, but on my patch I tend to look forward to the first returning flocks of colourful Black-tailed Godwits dropping in on the warm evenings, or monitoring the fortunes of scarce breeders locally, such as European Turtle Dove. But it's also a great time to connect with a rare tern (see page 36), as I've been lucky enough to realise in recent years.

We've got plenty of great content in this month's issue, with the second instalment of our Observatory Focus series profiling Bardsey Island (page 24). If you're still considering your options for this autumn, perhaps this will offer some much-needed inspiration!

Josh Jones

FEATURES

24 Brilliant Bardsey
Off the coast of north-west Wales lies a haven for migrant birds: Steve and Emma Stansfield introduce Bardsey Island.

30 The state of our bird clubs
Local bird societies make up the backbone of British birding, but what role do they have in 2023 – and how are they faring post-pandemic? Keith Betton reports.

36 Field ID notes: summer terns
Midsummer is a fantastic time to be on the lookout for unusual terns. Josh Jones examines some of the possibilities.

42 Britain's waterbird wonderland
The Fens hold an impressive array of special wildlife, including some of the UK's rarest breeding birds. Jon Heath profiles this unique region.

48 The vanishing forest
Deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon has accelerated in recent years, with Rondônia on the frontline. Matt Eade recently visited the region.

53 The 'slow birding' movement
Rebecca Armstrong spoke to Jonnie Fisk about the benefits of greener travel and what is possible in Europe.

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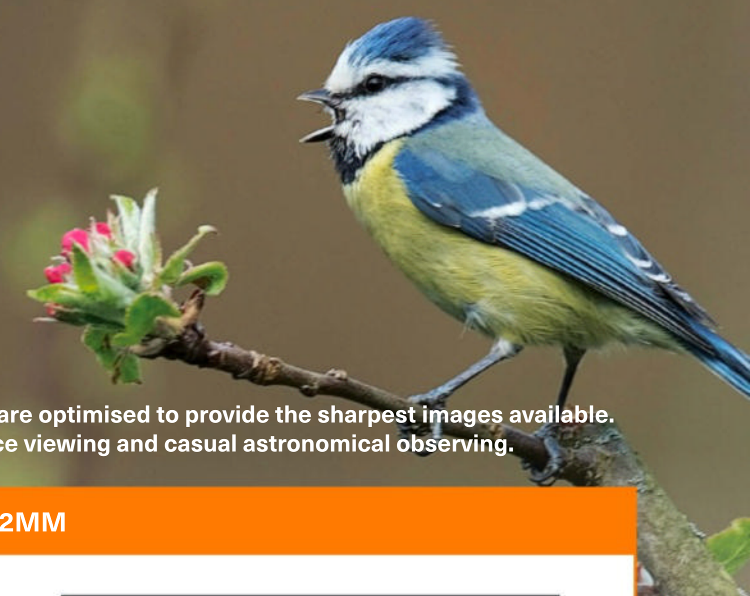

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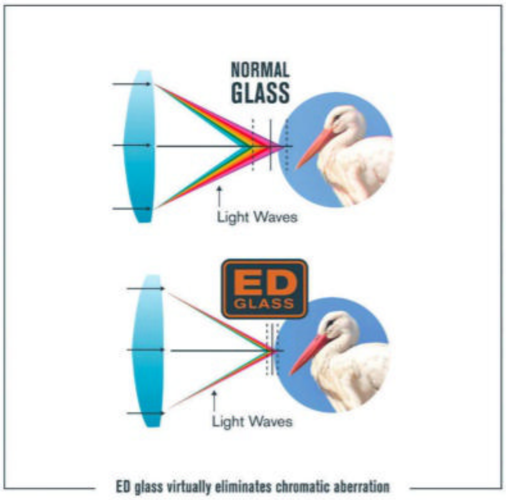

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10

WESTERN SUBALPINE WARBLER BY REBECCA NASON

REGULARS

6 The big picture
An iconic Asian wader is the focus of attention this month.

8 The big stories
An extraordinary gathering of scoter made headlines in Fife, while Bardsey scored an all-too-brief Song Sparrow.

10 Analysis: Britain and Ireland
May's Grey-headed Lapwing looks destined to be added to the British list, but a wide-ranging Yellow-billed Kite was more contentious. Sam Viles reports on a lively month.

14 Analysis: Western Palearctic
From a potential regional first in Turkey to a lingering Ancient Murrelet in Spain, it truly was a superb month for major rarities.

19 Voice from the north
Alan Tilmouth's home county was in the limelight in May when what could prove to be the bird of the year was found, resulting in a memorable twitch.

21 Talking birds
Whether it's Great Northern Divers in the European countryside or African Fish Eagles in Asia, directors dubbing out-of-context bird calls into films and TV shows can be a source of great exasperation for birders, says David Waugh.

76 Letters and photos
The ethics of listing and Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers have you writing in this month.

78 Murmurations
When non-birders try to describe a bird they don't recognise, prepare for any outcome, says Lucy McRobert.

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What's in the digital edition?

JULY'S digital edition has plenty of bonus content, including:

- Sound recordings of Manx Shearwater;
- Film of rare terns;
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- Video of July patch targets;
- A map of Bardsey Island;
- Film of rarities and scarcities from Britain, Ireland and the wider Western Palearctic.

The digital edition is available for PC, Mac, iPhone/iPad and Android. Sample issues are free, and subscriptions or single copies can be purchased. Visit www.pktmags.com/bw-digital to find out more.

Birdwatch
FINDING FALCONS

42

WESTERN MARSH HARRIER BY ROBIN CHITTENDEN

EXPERT REVIEWS

59 Canon's new digital monocular is designed to help people explore nature in a new and dynamic fashion. But how does it perform? Kit Day takes a closer look.

EXPERT ADVICE

64 The best time of day for photography, garden moth trapping, July patch targets and second-brood biology are all covered this month.

YELLOW-LEGGED GULL BY ED STUBBS

SAINAM 51 (WWW.SHUTTERSTOCK.COM)

SAVING SPOON-BILLED

Some species of shorebirds are among the most threatened birds found anywhere in the world. Sadly, many members of this wonderful family have suffered significant declines in recent decades and are at genuine risk of extinction – and none more so than the unique Spoon-billed Sandpiper.

Like many other waders, 'Spoonies' are under threat from a host of familiar human-induced pressures. The species breeds on the Siberian tundra around the coasts of the Bering Sea and winters in South-East Asia, using the East Asian-Australasian Flyway to commute between breeding and wintering grounds. Reclamation of intertidal habitats along the flyway for development has had a serious impact on this and several other shorebird species that rely on such areas to stage and refuel on their long migrations. Additionally, it was found that unsustainable levels of trapping on wintering grounds, particularly in Myanmar, were contributing to the plummeting population.

The species declined from an estimated 2,800 breeding pairs in the 1970s to 1,000 pairs in 2000, and fewer than 250 pairs in 2014. Between 2000 and 2009, the population was declining by 26% per year. In 2010, the species was facing imminent extinction, predicted to occur within a decade, and the Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force was established.

Huge international effort has been put in to understanding and halting the decline, including a 'headstarting' programme in which eggs were taken from the wild and the chicks raised in captivity before being released, as well as the establishment of a captive population (at Slimbridge WWT, Gloucestershire), educational initiatives, co-ordinated winter counts and much more besides.

While the precipitous decline has been lessened, numbers continue to fall and it is feared that just a few hundred individuals now survive in the wild. Complications in the captive population have seen precious adults lost to disease. Despite the ongoing efforts, the future very much still hangs in the balance for this extraordinary wader. ■

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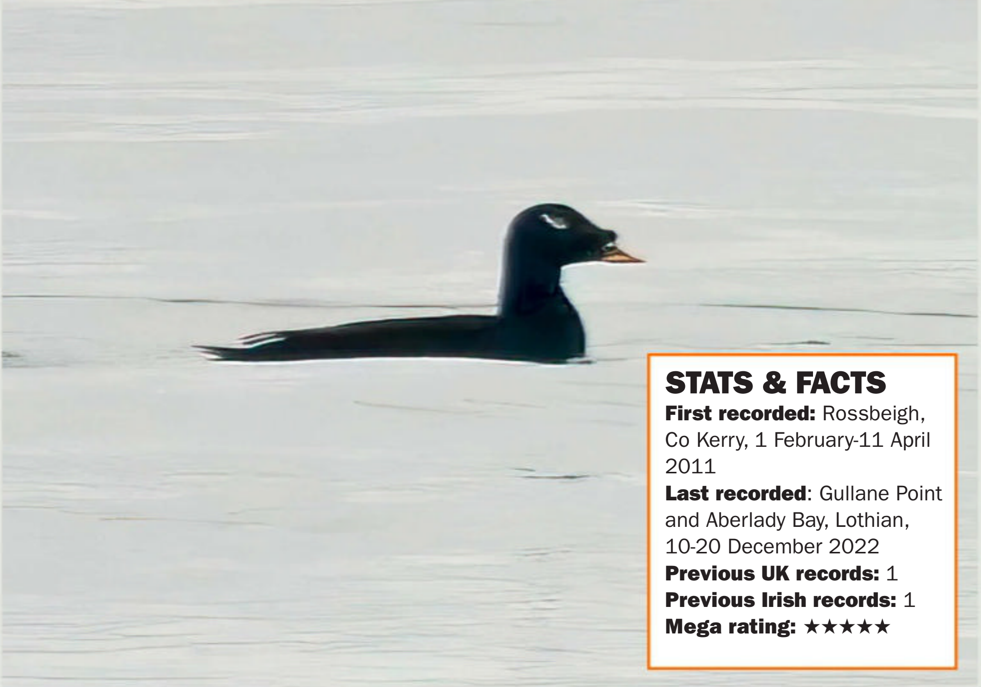
FINDER'S REPORT

The Scottish scoter spectacular

An extraordinary gathering of scoter in Fife included not only a fine drake Stejneger's Scoter, found by *Jared Wilson,* but multiple White-winged and Surf Scoter too.

Stejneger's Scoter: Largo Bay, Fife, 28 April-13 May 2022


MICHAEL ILETT

The drake Stejneger's Scoter remained relatively close offshore throughout the early May bank holiday weekend, displaying contentedly to any available Velvet Scoter and proving popular with birders.

STATS & FACTS

First recorded: Rossbeigh, Co Kerry, 1 February-11 April 2011
Last recorded: Gullane Point and Aberlady Bay, Lothian, 10-20 December 2022
Previous UK records: 1
Previous Irish records: 1
Mega rating: ★★★★★

DURING early 2023, scoter numbers in Largo Bay, Fife, had increased to the highest figures recorded for several years. The first Surf Scoter at Ruddon's Point since 2015 was a promising sign, and the increase in Velvet Scoter triggered a few local birders to wonder whether we might finally get in on some of nearby Lothian's White-winged Scoter action.

After a brief visit to The Temple at Lower Largo on 27 April, I decided to return the next evening when I'd have more time to check through the Velvet Scoter, and the viewing conditions were forecast to be better. That following evening, I arrived and started scanning the closest scattered group of Velvet Scoter, some 200 m offshore. I got to about the tenth bird, an adult male, and was stopped in my tracks. "Surely that's a Stejneger's," I found myself saying under my breath. But that couldn't be right. I'd come here to check the Velvets for something rarer, sure, but I'd barely started looking – and the scoter wasn't a distant blob that kept disappearing behind waves. This isn't how birding tends to work! I took another look.

I watched the bird for a couple more minutes, during which time it was unhelpfully facing away. Its straight, sloping forehead with an obvious 'protuberance' by the nostril, and an elongated white 'flash' up behind the eye and narrowing to a point all looked good. I messaged some local birders asking whether they were nearby as I thought I had a Stejneger's Scoter. The bird promptly tucked its head in and, after a couple of minutes, the doubts set in. Were the bill and head profile really that pronounced?

Thankfully, the bird woke up a few minutes later and I managed more prolonged views of the head profile and bill. I was reassured that I hadn't been imagining things. The straight, sloping forehead lacked the 'step' down to the swollen bill base of White-winged. The bill had a prominent, almost horn-like projection that appeared 'stuck on' at the nostrils, which the forehead and bill profile exacerbated. The extensive black on the bill reached from the bill base to the nostrils, with the area in front of these being reddish-orange (in better light the next day, the yellow lower border to the red was clearly visible).

Not wanting to take my eyes off the bird for too long in case I lost it, I put the news out on the Fife grapevine and Twitter. A few minutes later, Ken Shaw and Simon Pinder arrived and quickly got onto the bird, much to my relief and theirs.

That evening, Alex Shepherd posted some videograbs on the Fife grapevine, taken at The Temple earlier that day, flagging a bird that he thought might be the Stejneger's Scoter. Extraordinarily, the image was of a White-winged Scoter!

I arrived at Lower Largo very early on 29 April and headed east of the village as the birders around The Temple hadn't had any luck. A couple of minutes into my scan I spotted an adult male White-winged Scoter close inshore, and put the news out. The steeply sloping forehead that met the swollen bill base produced an obvious 'step' above the nostril bulge, and the nasal bulge appeared to be an integral part of the bill, strikingly different to the profile of the Stejneger's I'd found only 12 hours earlier.

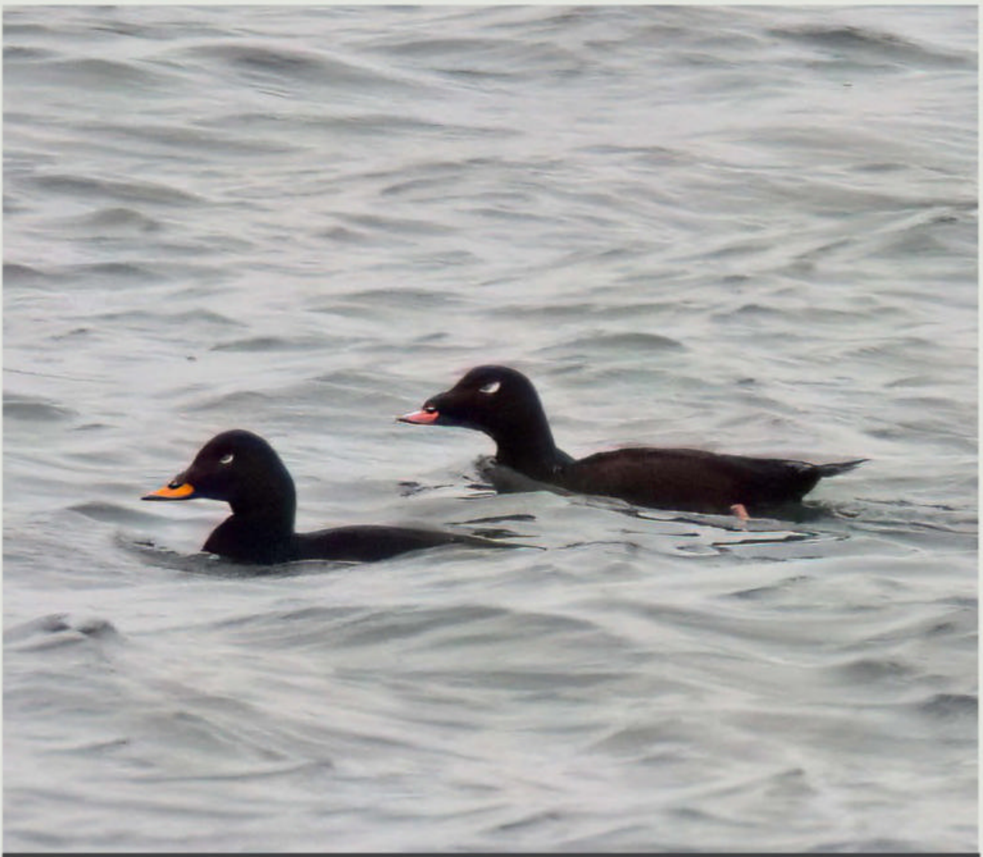
I returned to the birders by The Temple who were now on a White-winged Scoter, though it seemed likely a different male as it was west of the bird that I'd been watching. They also indicated that a second bird had been seen further west still, although when the Stejneger's was refound in that area a short while later, some assumed that it must have been that rather than a second White-winged Scoter (two White-winged seemed a bit far-fetched at the time). However, it does seem highly likely that three White-winged Scoter were present on the morning of 29th, as well as early morning on 30th, with a fourth bird also found further east at Dunbarnie Links mid-morning on 30th.

The Stejneger's Scoter was present until 13 May, ranging along a 4-km stretch of coast centred at Lower Largo. During its stay it was regularly seen displaying to a female Velvet Scoter. After the peak of four adult male White-winged Scoter on 30 April, two were present up to 5 May and one lingered until 14th. Then, on 21 May, a single male White-winged Scoter was present at Leven. The number of Velvet Scoter declined during the first week of May, with very few present after 14th.

An apparent White-winged × Velvet Scoter hybrid was reported several times, as was a Velvet Scoter with aberrant bill colouration (black with small dirty yellow patches at the base and a large pale nail). At some angles these birds might appear, at least superficially, to resemble White-winged Scoter.

Was the Lower Largo Stejneger's Scoter the same bird as that seen in Lothian in December 2022? The influx and turnover of Velvet Scoter at Largo Bay during April 2023 was extraordinary. Anyone claiming that a short stretch of Fife coast could hold four White-winged and a Stejneger's Scoter would, previously, have been dismissed as delusional. It is therefore conceivable that it was different.

Between late January and late April 2023, this short section of Fife coast has held Pacific Diver, White-billed Diver, King Eider, five Surf Scoter, four White-winged Scoter and one Stejneger's Scoter. The supporting cast consisted of Velvet and Common Scoter, Great Northern, Black-throated and Red-throated Divers, Black-necked, Red-necked and Slavonian Grebes, Greater Scaup, Long-tailed Duck, Common Eider, Red-breasted Merganser and Black Guillemot. It all added up to an exceptional few months of birding. ■


STEVE NUTTALL

On the same evening that the Stejneger's identification came to light, videograbs of the scoter flock revealed a male White-winged Scoter (right bird) alongside the many Velvet Scoter (left). Both rarer species were seen the next morning, with a further three White-winged being found on subsequent dates.

REPORT

Bardsey on song

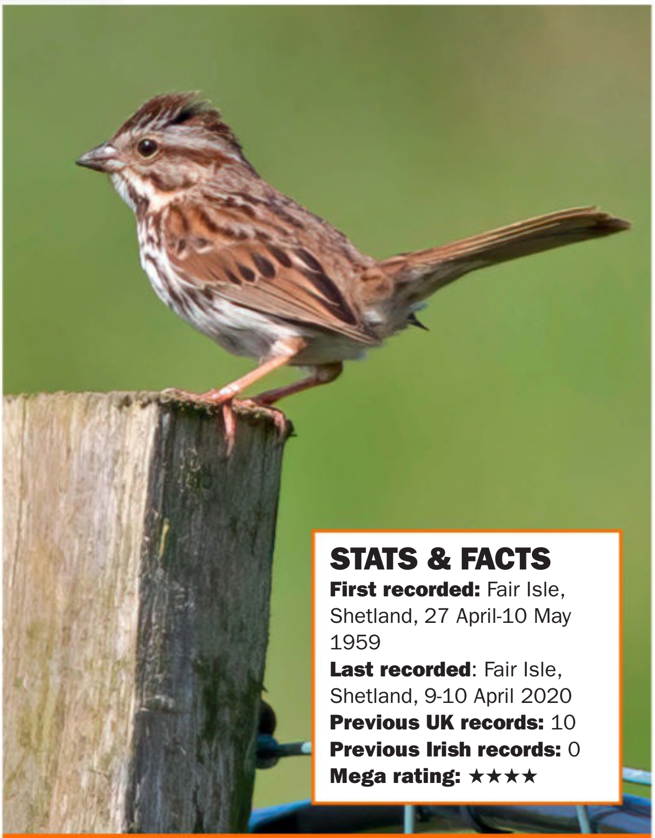
A highly desired North American sparrow sadly proved to be a one-day bird on the Welsh island.

A Song Sparrow on Bardsey Island, Gwynedd, on 9 May had twitchers springing into action. The last easily gettable bird in Britain was one at Seaforth, Lancashire, as far back as October 1994, making this latest individual a major find.

Located on the roof of the bird observatory early in the morning, a brilliant co-ordinated effort from observatory staff and local boatmen allowed just over 20 birders to reach the island that day. It proved a tense wait for many that afternoon, with the bird proving mobile between gardens and patches of gorse at the north end of the island. After initially playing hard to get, it put in a stellar performance that evening before day trippers had to depart back to the mainland. A sigh or two of relief was undoubtedly breathed on the boat journey back to Porth Meudwy!

Impressively for a species with only 10 previous British records – and five of those from Fair Isle – this is Bardsey's second. The first of these, and Britain's third at the time, resided on the island from 5-8 May 1970. Unfortunately, this latest individual bucked the trend of extended stays and proved to be a one-day bird, performing an overnight disappearing act.

Song Sparrow is a species prone to crossing the Atlantic by ship – a trait emphasised by a record of one alongside a Dark-eyed Junco onboard *Federal Severn* between Orkney and Shetland as it voyaged from Canada to Norway in late April. ■


SAM VILES

STATS & FACTS
First recorded: Fair Isle, Shetland, 27 April-10 May 1959
Last recorded: Fair Isle, Shetland, 9-10 April 2020
Previous UK records: 10
Previous Irish records: 0
Mega rating: ★★★★

Song Sparrow: Bardsey Island, Gwynedd, 9 May 2023

Rarities and scarcities: May 2023

JAY HUTCHINS

This adult Yellow-billed Kite caused headlines when it was found on the Isle of Wight on 10th, lingering until 14th before being seen in Cornwall the following day. Coinciding with a large south-westerly movement of Red Kites, could this bird be a truly wild individual?

A month of two firsts?

While May's Grey-headed Lapwing looks destined to be added to the British list, a wide-ranging Yellow-billed Kite was more contentious. *Sam Viles* reports on a lively month.

Everything felt somewhat delayed this May, with the overall tallies of spring migrants seemingly decreasing year on year. It was a period where unsettled and often cold weather dominated, with migration failing to gain any real rhythm before a welcome late push of waders and Black Terns. However, May will be remembered fondly for some absolutely monster finds, including yet another British first.

A national first on a Bank Holiday Monday is a sure-fire hit no matter what the species, although few would have anticipated the jaw-dropping discovery of a Grey-headed Lapwing at Low Newton-by-the-Sea, Northumberland, from 1st. Unsurprisingly, it proved the most popular bird of the year to date by some distance, raising £1,443 for a local nature reserve in the process. After its departure on 8th, a Scottish tour took it to Crail, Fife, on 11th, Lossiemouth, Moray, on 13th and then the Outer Hebrides at Balemore, North Uist, from 26-29th. You have to wonder where it might venture next – might it copy recent White-tailed Lapwings and tour Britain through the summer, or is an Irish appearance next on the cards? This East Asian wader represents just the fourth record for the WP, after birds in Turkey in 2018, Norway, Sweden and The Netherlands in 2019 and Slovenia in 2021.

Yellow-billed Kite is one of the commonest raptors across Africa, though few would gamble on a wild British occurrence. A curious pattern of records has begun to emerge across northern Europe in recent years, however, despite escape talk clouding the picture. Intriguingly, an adult was at Lynn Tip, Isle of Wight, from 10-14th, before putting in an appearance over Polgigga, Cornwall, the following day. Its south-westerly movement coincided with the now-annual dispersal of Red Kites into the South-West, with a huge count of 200 over Nanjizal, Cornwall, on 17th. Additionally, Black Kites were seen over nine Cornish sites, with others in six more counties.

This spring has seen a big arrival of American sparrows, with assistance from ships likely a factor. A one-day Welsh wonder saw a Song Sparrow on Bardsey Island, Gwynedd, on 9th (see page 9), while Dark-eyed Juncos were at High Kelling, Norfolk, on 6th and Rattray Head, Aberdeenshire, from 9-11th. The last is a first for the Aberdeenshire mainland, while Scotland's last widely twitchable individual came as long ago as the turn of the century, making this one very popular indeed.

KEITH YATES

Found at Rattray Head, Aberdeenshire, this Dark-eyed Junco was one of two in May.

The highlight in Ireland this month was a first-summer male Eastern Black-eared Wheatear at South Slob, Co Wexford, on 6th. News broke mid-afternoon, leaving only a few short hours for Irish birders to make it down to the country's south-east corner for a chance at connecting before darkness fell. Needless to say, the bird departed overnight – a frustratingly common trend with vagrant wheatears in spring. Black-eared wheatears are always tricky to identify in this plumage and this bird initially caused some head scratching. First identified as a Western, later photos showed black speckling in lower parts of the throat and above the eye, better matching

BRYDON THOMASON

This dapper summer-plumaged Pacific Diver was photographed off Brough Lodge on Fetlar, Shetland, on 18th, with another discovered off Toormore, Co Cork, on 21st.

melanoleuca. Not that most Irish birders would have minded either way – of the five previous records, two are identified as Western, one as Eastern and two unassigned. The only other Eastern was one on Great Saltee Island, Co Wexford, in May 1987.

Also in Ireland was a fine adult Semipalmated Plover at the wader hotbed of Tacumshin, Co Wexford, on 19th. Somewhat surprisingly, the species remains a genuine rarity in Ireland and this is only the country's eighth record, although three of these have now resided at Tacumshin.

Wader passage was off-kilter for much of May, with birders really bemoaning the lack of movement. Things took a turn for the better with a sudden rush towards the month's end, mainly comprising High-Arctic shorebirds such as Sanderling and *tundrae* Ringed Plovers. The latter species is often a carrier of Broad-billed Sandpiper and no fewer than six were recorded during May, with Anglesey, Norfolk, Northumberland, Orkney and Shetland all getting in on the act, while most exciting of all was one inland at Hatfield Moors, South Yorkshire, on 27th.

One species bucking the trend was Temminck's Stint, which saw its best May showing for several years. A healthy 74 sites hosted the species, with in excess of 100 birds involved. Ruff also put in an eye-catching showing, with a major movement early in the month across central and eastern England. A mammoth flock of 394 flew through at Burnham Norton, Norfolk, while, inland, 90 passed through at Nene Washes, Cambridgeshire, and 72 were at Pulborough Brooks, West Sussex.

It was a spectacular month for Black-winged Stilts, with birds brightening wetlands as far north as Aberdeenshire and Caithness – the latter representing a county first. Some 50 sites in total recorded the species, which looks set for a record-breaking breeding season as several pairs settle down to nest.

On the rarity front, a Great Snipe highlighted at Spurn, East Yorkshire, on 31st, with Long-billed Dowitchers in three counties and a Lesser Yellowlegs in Co Donegal. Other Nearctic visitors comprised six American Golden Plovers, a Buff-breasted Sandpiper on South Uist and Pectoral Sandpipers at no fewer than 16 sites. Four Kentish Plovers were in England and Little Stints also put in a good showing in the second half of the month.

The return of an Elegant Tern to Inishroo, Co Galway, on 21st was made even more noteworthy by the presence of the regular adult Forster's Tern in the same colony. A second-calendar-year Forster's remained an intermittent visitor to Poole Harbour, Dorset. Three Caspian Terns were seen, including a first-summer in Norfolk, in addition to six White-winged and two Gull-billed Terns.

A displaying adult Laughing Gull on Gugh, Scilly, from 5th seems likely to be the same bird that spent several weeks wandering around the islands late last summer. Shetland was treated to a pristine adult Bonaparte's Gull at Hillwell, Mainland, from 2-4th, with one still at Hayle Estuary, Cornwall. Ring-billed Gulls comprised a lingering adult in Perth and Kinross and a first-summer at Gearhies, Co Cork.

'Pom days' are one of the most anticipated events on the birding calendar in south-east England, with 4th producing this year. Flocks of Pomarine Skuas passed a large number of coastal localities between Charmouth, Dorset, in the west and Dungeness, Kent, in the east, with a high day count of 42 past 'Dunge'. Skua passage off the Outer Hebrides largely flattered to deceive however, although 31 Long-tailed Skuas passed Aird an

TOM SHEVLIN

Ireland's second confirmed record of Eastern Black-eared Wheatear was at South Slob, Co Wexford, on 6th.

TOM SHEVLIN

Also in Co Wexford, Tacumshin's third Semipalmated Plover – and the eighth for Ireland – was found on 19th.

Runair, North Uist, on 16th.

A Black-browed Albatross off Skellig Michael, Co Kerry, on 16th is likely the one that spent a day there in May 2018 and an early Great Shearwater was off Mangurstadh, Lewis, with a Cory's Shearwater photographed from a boat off Hartlepool, Cleveland. Two Sabine's Gulls were off Shetland.

Recent splitting has added a layer of complexity to the tricky subalpine warbler complex. All three members of the species group were well represented this month, with a male Moltoni's Warbler at Portland, Dorset, on 12th being the most notable in terms of rarity value. A Western Subalpine followed at the same site eight days later, with two more in Shetland. Eastern Subalpines were in Gwynedd and Shetland, with birds not assigned to species level at 10 further localities nationwide.

Recent years have seen a marked increase in Great Reed Warbler records, prompting speculation that a breeding attempt might be on the horizon. East Anglia enjoyed a particularly fruitful showing during May, recording six, in addition to songsters in Kent, Somerset, Nottinghamshire, Worcestershire, East Yorkshire (two) and Lancashire.

Savi's Warbler has a more established history as a breeder on British shores, though the only bird reported this month was a singing male at Blacktoft Sands RSPB, East Yorkshire. Blyth's Reed Warblers were in East Yorkshire, Orkney (two) and the Outer Hebrides, with six Marsh Warblers reported. Both Sussex and Gloucestershire enjoyed their first records of Iberian Chiffchaff.

With their scarlet-red plumage, adult male Common Rosefinches are always popular when they appear. It was Cumbria's turn to host this attractive overshoot from 26th, with one singing in gardens on the outskirts of Kendal. Adding some fascinating insight into the bird's life history, a ring on its right leg had been fitted on Fair Isle on 13 June 2022. More expected 'brown' first-summers were at four additional sites.

Kent's third Short-toed Treecreeper of 2023 was at Dungeness on 5th, while an unseasonal Siberian Stonechat stopped off at Scatness, Mainland Shetland, on 8th and a brief Little Bunting was at Calf of Man. Scarce migrant totals included four Rosy Starlings, seven Wrynecks, 13 European Serins, six Woodchat Shrikes and more than 30 Red-backed Shrikes. A female Red-tailed Shrike at West Rise Marsh, East Sussex, on 30th was a county first. Both Hoopoe and Golden Oriole had excellent showings, numbering in excess of 50 apiece, while European Bee-eaters included a flock of up to 14 tracked from East Yorkshire to Suffolk.

The first Iberian Wagtail for Scotland was at Balormie, Moray, on 24th; *Motacilla* action elsewhere consisted of a Black-headed Wagtail at Cley Marshes, Norfolk, two Citrine Wagtails and more than 20 Grey-headed Wagtails. Bluethroats reached into double digits. In Gloucestershire, the male White-spotted Bluethroat returned to Slimbridge WWT for a third summer. Arrivals on Isle of May, Fife, included as many as six Red-spotted Bluethroats and singles of Icterine Warbler and Red-breasted Flycatcher.

Four Greater Short-toed Larks included one in Pembrokeshire that appeared a close match for the North African subspecies *hermonensis*. A Tawny Pipit was on St Mary's, Scilly, three Red-throated and two Richard's Pipits were seen, five Shore Larks lingered and Fair Isle bagged an Olive-backed Pipit.

It appeared that the Alpine

IAN SMITH

Pallid Harriers were recorded in 10 counties during May, including this young male at Spurn, East Yorkshire. How long will it be until this once-mega raptor is demoted from the list of BBRC rarities?

MARK JOHNSON

Present for a fortnight from 1st, this drake Blue-winged Teal (left bird) proved popular as it visited reserves on the Lincolnshire side of The Wash, often in the company of Garganey.

DARREN CHAPMAN

An incredible 50 sites recorded Black-winged Stilt, including as far north as Caithness, rendering it one of the best months on record for the species. It seems likely that several pairs will attempt to breed in England – stay tuned for more on this in a future edition of *Birdwatch*.

Swift invasion wasn't quite over, with birds sighted in Dorset, Northumberland and Co Kerry. Eight Red-rumped Swallows included birds in Caithness and Shetland; more intriguing were reports of a Pacific Swift at Ham Wall RSPB, Somerset, on 5th and 8th, but it wasn't seen again.

An excellent Pallid Harrier showing produced birds in 10 counties and it cannot be too long until this once-mega rarity is downgraded from the list of species considered by the BBRC altogether. By modern standards, it was also a strong month for Montagu's Harrier, with at least 15 birds in England and – most notably – three in Ireland (including a male in Co Antrim).

It's possible that reports of a Short-toed Snake Eagle from Cumbria and Perth and Kinross relate to the Highland bird returning for a third summer. Six Red-footed Falcons were noted and European Honey Buzzards returned to publicised watchpoints in Norfolk, Nottinghamshire and North Yorkshire. A Gyr Falcon was at Cove, Highland, on 11th, with a Snowy Owl on Fair Isle from 22nd.

Although the Black-crowned Night Heron influx didn't reach the heady heights of April, some 60 were reported across Britain and Ireland, with maximum counts of 40 in England, 12 in Ireland, five in Scotland and three in Wales. Some 30 sites hosted Purple Herons, while a good arrival of Squacco Herons produced birds in Cornwall, Dorset, Sussex, Lancashire, North Yorkshire and Co Wexford.

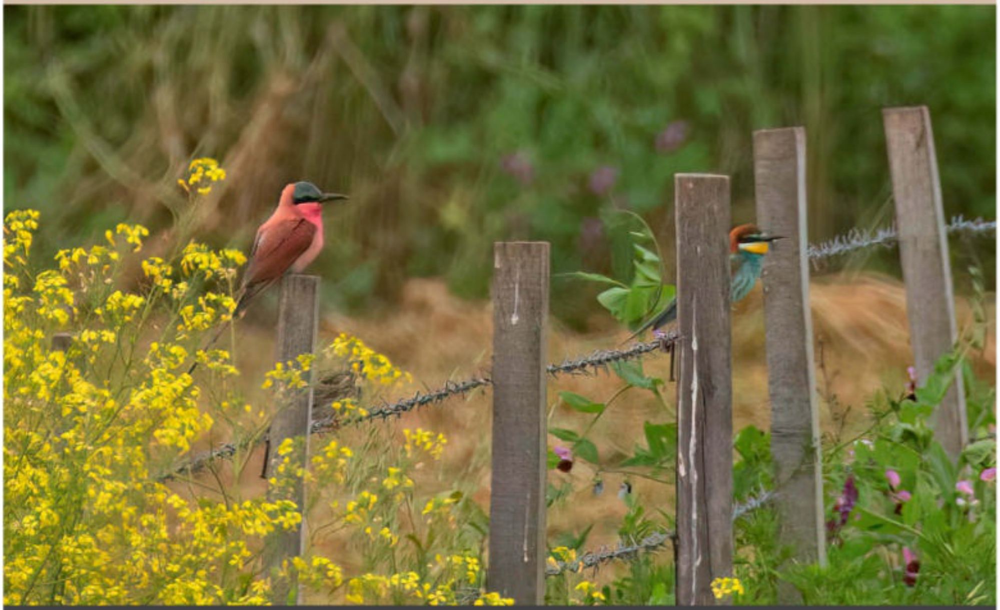
Glossy Ibis was the latest species to arrive en masse, with bumper flocks consisting of 17 over Skomer, Pembrokeshire, 16 at Cotswold Water Park, Wiltshire, and 14 moving along the Norfolk coast, plus 13 in Hampshire and 12 in Oxfordshire. A surreal sighting involved two over the ferry between Ullapool, Highland, and Stornoway, Lewis, on 6th!

Breeding-plumaged Pacific Divers are very rare in the Western Palearctic, making the discovery of two nothing short of remarkable. One was photographed off Brough Lodge, Fetlar, on 18th, with another off Toormore, Co Cork, on 21st. Meanwhile, the Fife bird was seen again. White-billed Divers remained off several sites in northern Scotland.

Away from the Fife 'scoter fest' (see pages 8-9), wildfowl interest peaked with a drake Blue-winged Teal cavorting with Garganey on the RSPB's Lincolnshire Wash reserves until 14th. More questionable was the discovery of a drake Baikal Teal with Mallards on a disused coastal lido at Macduff, Aberdeenshire, on 10th. Although unringed and fully winged, its somewhat strange location and chosen carrier species might yet prove a barrier when it comes to acceptance. If given the nod of approval, it would be a second for Scotland after the Fair Isle bird in 2021.

Historically, records of Ferruginous Duck in Britain tend to appear between late summer and early spring, so the recent trend of birds in late spring-early summer is somewhat unexplained. As many as eight were seen in May, while six Lesser Scaup included two in Staffordshire. The Hooded Merganser remained at Whinfell Tarn, Cumbria, until 15th. Ring-necked Duck were at 12 sites, with American Wigeon at six and Green-winged Teal at eight. The American Black Duck in Co Mayo remained a permanent fixture. Up to eight Surf Scoter were off three Scottish counties and King Eider were in Aberdeenshire and Shetland. Wayward Taiga Bean Geese were in Aberdeenshire and the Outer Hebrides, with a Black Brant in Norfolk. ■

Western Palearctic: May 2023



NIZAMETTIN YAVUZ

This Southern Carmine Bee-eater (left bird) caused a major stir when it appeared in Turkey in the second half of the month. Its origin is up for debate, but it seems reasonable to assume it might be a wild bird.

A May full of megas

From a potential regional first in Turkey to a lingering Ancient Murrelet in Spain, it truly was a superb month for major rarities, as *Sam Viles* details.

It was a terrific month for mega-rare visitors across the region, although few would have predicted the jaw-dropping discovery of a Southern Carmine Bee-eater among a flock of European Bee-eaters at Kızılırmak Delta, Turkey, on 21-22nd – a potential Turkish and WP first. Although not a widely anticipated vagrant to the region, the species is a short- to medium-distance migrant with records up to 1,500 km outside of its normal range – although its occurrence in Turkey would shatter all previous records. Virtually unknown in captivity, the species' distribution overlaps with European Bee-eater's during the austral summer and, in theory, there is nothing to suggest that it hasn't arrived with these birds returning to Europe for the summer. It may yet prove to be a record breaker in more ways than one – if accepted, it will become Turkey's 500th recorded bird species.

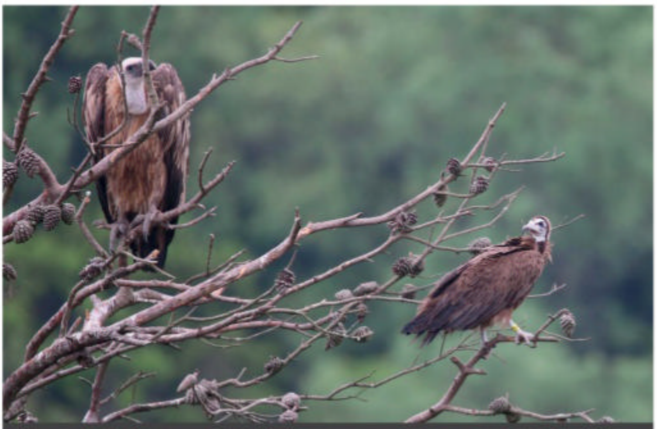
Another example of surprise Afrotropical vagrancy saw a Hooded Vulture at a feeding station on the southern edge of the Strait of Gibraltar. Lingering alongside up to three Rüppell's Vultures at Jbel Mousa, Morocco, from 22 April, it is thought to have accompanied either Egyptian or Griffon Vultures on their northbound migration back from the Sahel. The bird, an immature, was trapped and fitted with a PVC ring (yellow 'M04') and remained on site until 10 May. It is just the fifth record for the WP as well as the third for Morocco – the others concerning two at Sbayera in June 1955 and one at Oued El Feida in 1963. Equally unexpected was Georgia's first Bateleur – an immature over Chachuna on 29th.

On 29 April, an adult Yellow-billed Kite – the Afrotropical counterpart to Black Kite – was photographed near Raalte, The Netherlands, relocating to Pervijze, Belgium, on 1st, and subsequently crossing the English Channel to Britain. An intriguing pattern of records of the taxon in northern Europe has begun to emerge in recent years, although the jury remains out regarding exactly where they are coming from.

Even more surprising was the occurrence of an Ancient Murrelet at the mouth of the Odiel River at Huelva, Spain, from 24th. This delightful North Pacific alcid has been recorded in the region just twice before – a summering adult on Lundy, Devon, between 1990 and 1992 and one in Finland in 2021 – although nobody would have gambled on the southern Spanish coast for the third. The story almost took a sombre turn on 25th, when the bird became trapped in fishing line. Thankfully, quick-thinking twitchers managed to pull it to shore, untangling it before releasing it back onto the river. Elsewhere in Spain, a Red-billed Tropicbird flew past Tarifa on 7th, a Steppe Grey Shrike was at Villafáfila and the American Black Duck was near Sada.

Not to be overshadowed, gripping news of a Norwegian first comprised a male Pallas's Reed Bunting on Utsira from 21-23rd. This uber-rare visitor was only the 10th recorded in the WP away from its Arctic Russian breeding grounds and it hasn't occurred in Britain since 1990. Additionally, a Green Warbler was on Sula on 21st and two Baikal Teal were logged. A remarkable run of rarities near Vestbygd consisted of Wilson's Phalarope, Pacific Diver and Norway's second White-tailed Lapwing, the last bird having previously spent two days near Varberg, Sweden. A small run of extralimital White-tailed Lapwings across Europe saw two more in Hungary and one at Berndorf, Austria.

Finnish birders enjoyed an excellent May: the nation's third Baikal Teal at Ähtäri was complemented by a Caspian Stonechat at Pasalankylä and a Sociable Lapwing at Rannankylä, with Nearctic visitors including a Lesser Yellowlegs at Viurilanlahti and a Black Scoter off Ohtakari. No



RACHID EL KHAMLICHI

Morocco's first Hooded Vulture (right bird) for 60 years came as a surprise from 22 April. It marks only the fifth regional record.

fewer than two French-ringed Bonelli's Eagles were seen over Skagen, Denmark, with one of these reaching Umeå, Sweden, on 28th – becoming the country's first. Also at Skagen was the second Pacific Diver for Denmark, with a Lesser Kestrel at Bulbjerg and a Black-winged Pratincole at Højer.

The influx of Mediterranean visitors to Iceland continued apace, including a Gull-billed Tern at Eyrarbakki, Black-winged Stilt at Álfsnes and no fewer than seven Black-crowned Night Herons. The adult drake White-winged Scoter continued at Reykjavík, with another at Svenska Högarna, Sweden.

A male Cretzschmar's Bunting made for an amazing garden find at Alblasserdam, The Netherlands, on 5th, with a Dark-eyed Junco in a Hippolytushoef garden on 7th. Other notable discoveries included a Calandra Lark at Oostvaardersplassen, Common Rock Thrush on Texel and Greater Sand Plover near Moddergat, with the Falcated Duck moving to Nieuwe Driemanspolder. Both Steppe and Lesser Spotted Eagles were noted overhead, while a wandering adult Bonelli's Eagle transited through Belgium on 23-24th before crossing into The Netherlands. A Eurasian Crag Martin was at Zeebrugge

In France, a Blue-cheeked Bee-eater was at La Garde on 30th, with Trumpeter Finch and Eastern Olivaceous Warbler both at Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer, Black-winged Pratincole at Le Cailar and Western Olivaceous Warbler in Corsica. The Bridled Tern returned for a second summer at Île aux Moutons and an adult Laughing Gull was in Nice. Additionally, two Elegant Terns were back at Île de Noirmoutier and an American Herring Gull was still in Brittany. Iberian, Black-headed and Ashy-headed Wagtails were recorded in the Channel Islands.

Amazing news from Germany concerned the discovery of at least four, probably five, Slender-billed Gulls. Switzerland's third Franklin's Gull was at Klingnauer Stausee and a Greater Sand Plover was at Hel, Poland. Croatia's first Cretzschmar's Bunting was seen at Dinjiška.

A selection of other notable records included Romania's second Masked Shrike at Vadu, Hungary's third Great Spotted Cuckoo at Tihany, Slovenia's third Semicollared Flycatcher at Razdrto and Ukraine's fifth Booted Warbler at Dnipro. The first modern-day record of Spur-winged Lapwing for Montenegro was at Ulcinj Salina, with Romania's fifth at Techirgiol. Somewhat surprisingly, a Eurasian Spoonbill at Myshanka was only the fifth to be recorded in Belarus.

Antikythira Bird Observatory stole the headlines in Greece, hosting the country's third Hume's Leaf Warbler as well as two Green Warblers. Two Pacific Golden Plovers were on Sicily, Italy; belated news from Cyprus concerned a male Seebohm's Wheatear at Cape Greco on 29 April, the island's first record.

The now-annual passage of Crested Honey Buzzards in Egypt saw an astonishing 59 logged over Galala Bird Observatory between late April and mid-May. A Basra Reed Warbler was ringed at Eilat, Israel, and Syria recorded its first Arabian Green Bee-eater, although unfortunately it made its way into a hunter's bag. Azerbaijan's second Red-headed Bunting accompanied a flock of Black-headed Buntings at Absheron NP on 14th.

Last but not least, two Snow Geese were on Pico, Azores, late in the month. ■

VINCENT LEGRAND

The headline act of May was this superb Ancient Murrelet in southern Spain. Only the third record for the WP, it was found at the mouth of the Odiel River at Huelva on 24th and hung around there into June.

HÅKON HEGGLAND

Pallas's Reed Bunting is a major regional rarity away from its Polar Ural breeding grounds. This male was in Norway from 21-23rd.

ELVIN MEMMEDSOY

This particularly fetching male Red-headed Bunting at Absheron NP represented only the second record for Azerbaijan.

The bottleneck for one million raptors

Batumi Birdwatching Festival

18-23 September 2023, Batumi, Georgia

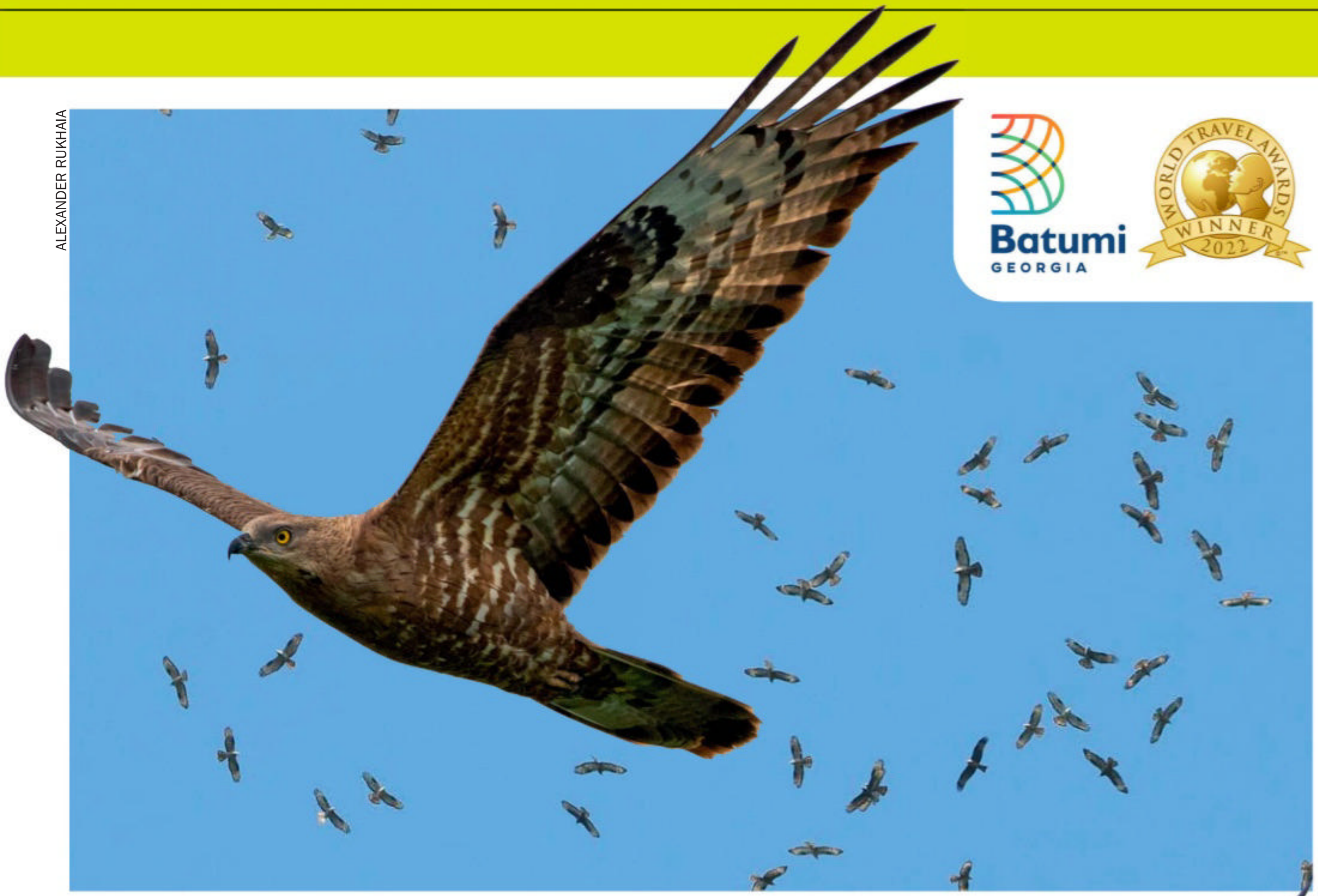
The Batumi Birdwatching Festival on the eastern Black Sea coast in Georgia is held in Ajara each autumn. Birders from all over the world come to witness the amazing migration spectacle of the Eastern Black Sea Migration Corridor.

The unique topography of the Batumi area and the autumn climate create the right conditions for spectacular migration. Approximately one million birds of prey pass through and on peak days raptor numbers can surpass 100,000. Even on an average day in September, at least 20,000 birds of prey will fly by. The most numerous species in this avian spectacle are huge numbers of European Honey Buzzard, Black Kite and Steppe Buzzard, with many other species travelling with them. Eagles, harriers, hawks and falcons also use the flyway and an amazing 35 species of birds of prey have been recorded.

The Batumi Birdwatching Festival takes place in September and there are several key locations in the region from where birders can witness the spectacle, as well as participate in the research work of Georgian and international ornithologists and learn about the diversity of migratory birds. According to the Batumi Raptor Count (**www.batumiraptorcount.org**), an amazing 1,159,199 migratory birds of prey were recorded in September-October 2022. In the right conditions, many of these birds pass at or below eye level and offer fantastic views.

At this time of year, other species are also passing through and large flocks of European Bee-eaters and European Rollers will add splashes of colour. There are different birding platforms in Ajara, which are in the villages of Sakhalvasho and Shuamta, and the migration can also be seen from the peatlands of Ispani, the Chorokhi river delta, and from the Mtirala and Kolkheti parks. The festival has been taking place since 2012, and there is always a relaxed and friendly atmosphere.

ALEXANDER RUKHAIA

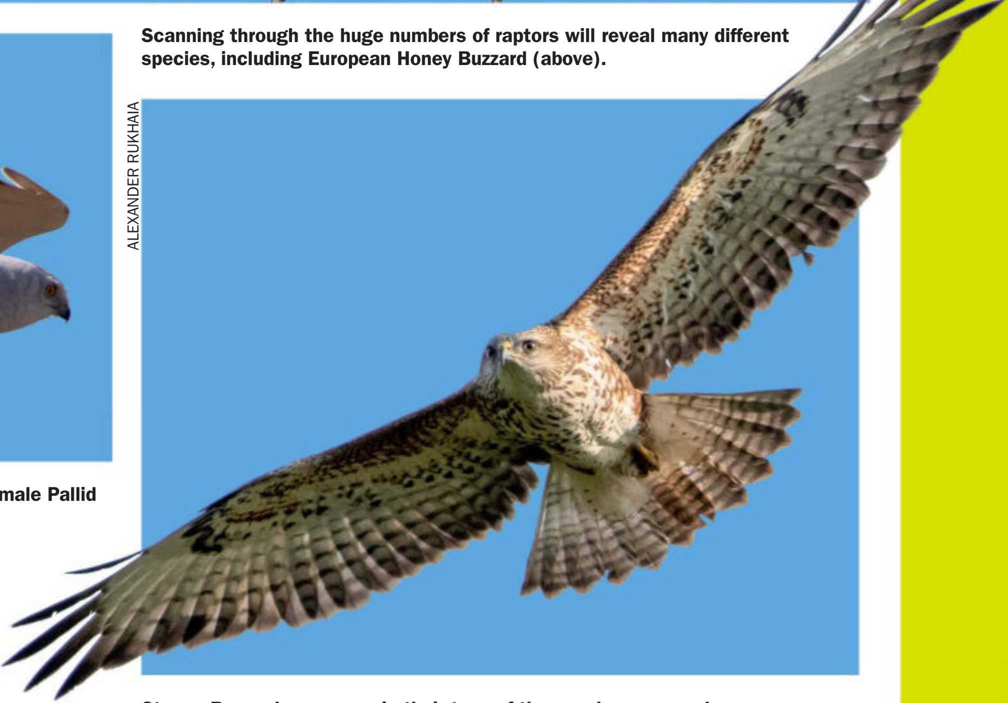


Scanning through the huge numbers of raptors will reveal many different species, including European Honey Buzzard (above).

ALEXANDER RUKHAIA

Harriers also move through in large numbers and a male Pallid is always a fine sight.

ALEXANDER RUKHAIA



Steppe Buzzards can pass in their tens of thousands on some days.

There is a good range of comfortable guesthouses that provide accommodation close to the various birding watchpoints. By staying in these family-run hostels, you contribute directly to the community-based conservation programme, and can arrange your time independently or spontaneously join regular day trips to the area around Batumi. If you prefer more comfort, various quality hotels are within easy reach, and an increasing number of tour operators are running tours to the area to witness this extraordinary spectacle. ■

The sight of a sky full of wheeling birds of prey is awesome and we are waiting to share the excitement with you in September. Let’s watch autumn migration in Batumi together!

VISIT BATUMI

FURTHER details of how to join the excitement of the 2023 festival can be found at:

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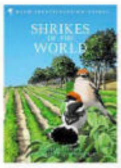
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ALAN TILMOUTH

Grey-headed heaven

Our columnist's home county was in the limelight in May when what could prove to be the bird of the year was found, resulting in a particularly memorable twitch.

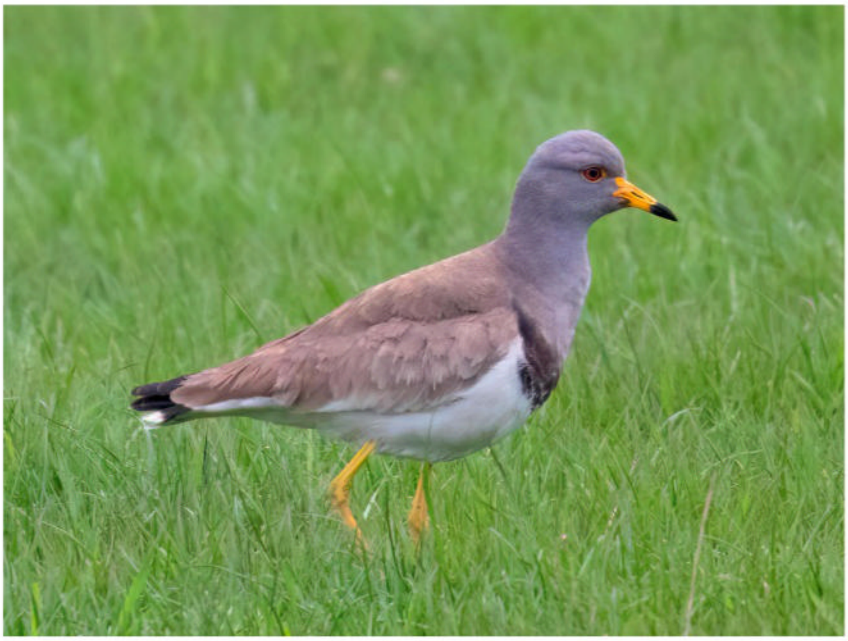
Unless you've been living under a stone you will have seen or heard about the latest new species for Britain by the time this is published: a Grey-headed Lapwing in my home county of Northumberland. You may have actually twitched it, read news stories about it, flicked through a zillion images (some better than others) and endured the selfies or scenic vistas of a hundred-and-one birders taken as they strolled down the 'road with the view' to Low Newton scrapes.

There have been many words already written about this huge rarity, the journeys undertaken, the views, the finder who, while deserving of credit, is modest enough to know that all finds are chance occurrences. As a dedicated patchbirder as much by circumstance as choice, Gary Woodburn will still be there following well-worn paths long after the lapwing has moved to flooded pastures new.

So, what could I add that might be new to one of the most hyped birds of the year? I could offer my personal story of valiantly finishing the vantage-point survey I was undertaking some 50 km away, before setting off in hot pursuit hoping the usual bank holiday A1 traffic carnage was running late. Or perhaps I could wax lyrical about the universe providing a just and well-deserving reward for once to someone involved in the creation of the wet pools that the lapwing was initially discovered on.

Reflecting on the bird several days later, and having been fortunate enough to make the short trek back up the A1 and spend a couple of hours gawping at the bird through the mist over the following bank holiday weekend, I have little doubt that this particular rarity will long be remembered by many birders from across the country.

It ticked a lot of boxes. It chose a splendidly iconic location in the north, with a castle in the background for good measure. The parking was easy and the walk was a short one, to be met by an outrageously good-looking 'foreign' wader marching about imperiously between dozing Greylags and grazing Brown Hares. The weather was decent and the views with no encroachment issues or negativity that can accompany some big twitches. I could go on. As one birder on Twitter commented: "Never have I been on a twitch and heard so much laughter coming from a bunch of birders." And this was true. Incredulity at the scene was rife, the pure joy of many obvious, the murmurs of appreciation rippling through the gathered crowd whenever this matt-grey and yellow-liveried, incongruous-looking shorebird deigned to stretch its wings or make a short flight to a new feeding patch.



GRAHAM JEPSON

The arrival of the Grey-headed Lapwing in Northumberland, and the subsequent twitch, were memorable for our columnist.

> "There's little doubt in my mind that the Grey-headed Lapwing will be one of the favourites to be crowned bird of the year"

Quick thinking from the finder created the opportunity to raise some much-needed cash for another local nature reserve at Embleton and a good chunk of money was donated by appreciative birders over several days. Despite relocating some 2 km to the north during the following days it was still proving to be a draw on Coronation Day, with many taking the opportunity to pay homage.

With further sightings of the same bird in Fife, Moray and the Outer Hebrides as the month wore on, there's little doubt in my mind that the Grey-headed Lapwing will be one of the favourites to be crowned bird of the year when the time arrives. Big rarities and the shared experience of them don't come much better than this. ■

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DAVID WAUGH

Sounding off

Whether it's Great Northern Divers in the European countryside or African Fish Eagles in Asia, directors dubbing out-of-context bird calls into films and TV shows can be a source of great exasperation for birders.

MATT MACGILLIVRAY

Dubbing the haunting calls of Great Northern Diver onto TV programmes and films seems to be a popular choice, wherever in the world the show may be set.

Bluebirds over the white cliffs of Dover? Not on your nelly, unless it's the mega-twitch of the millennium. Vera Lynn, the British Armed Forces' 'sweetheart', sang this popular World War II song probably unaware that bluebirds are New World natives. Let's point the finger of blame at Walter Kent and Nat Burton, the American lyricists who wrote the song, for not doing their homework. This unintended gaffe brings me to my beef about inaccuracies – some would say blunders – of cinema and television as to where in the world certain birds (and various other animals and plants) should be.

Picture this. You have settled down to watch a blockbuster film on the TV, and there is a dramatic chase happening in a forest in upstate New York. You are absorbed by the action and landscape, until, in the background comes the mellifluous cadence of a singing Willow Warbler! After the spit take of your drink, you start cursing about why it is that everything in the film is spot on except for the ambient soundtrack, which is from the wrong continent.

But worse is yet to come, as your fellow telly-watchers groan: "Here we go again". They simply don't understand, don't care, and want to get back to the film. It could be the other way round of course, of an idyllic English countryside scene, with a Northern Mockingbird belting out its repertoire off-camera. Or what about films of the knights of King Arthur in Britain of old. The camera pans down from the knight's gleaming helmet to the chainmail tunic, every detail meticulously researched and reproduced with no expense spared. The camera reaches his glove, on which is perched – a Harris's Hawk. *What!!!* The same film has a Merlin, of course, but not the avian kind.

Predictable and disappointing

You might imagine that I'm purple-faced with neck veins bulging whenever I suffer one of these bloopers but, after so many, I'm merely indignant and disappointed. Expert advice ensures that all other essential details are in place, but nature gets short shrift when off-the-shelf background is used without appropriate knowledgeable input. Exempt from complaint are productions made by natural history and wildlife professionals of course. Perhaps my perspective is awry. Maybe mistakes are made in classic-car restoration for filming, with resultant armchair meltdowns by many enthusiasts of that genre.

There are other transgressions you might recognise. Outdoor scenes which have a sinister element often incorporate the 'car-won't-start' rasping song of Cactus Wren – a native to the deserts of southern North America – irrespective of where in the world the scene might be. Another species whose calls impart a spooky atmosphere is Great Northern Diver, and again these are often applied with scant attention given to geographical location. And apparently, a good species for any jungle scene is Laughing Kookaburra!

> "You might imagine that I'm purple-faced with neck veins bulging whenever I suffer one of these bloopers"

Don't be surprised if a rainforest scene somewhere in South-East Asia is graced with the explosive reports of a Screaming Piha (an Amazonian resident) or even an African Fish Eagle! A good Western earns its spurs if it includes at least one scene of a bird of prey which calls like a Red-tailed Hawk, but in reality is a Turkey Vulture – yet in the film is called a buzzard. Closer to home, a TV series set in 1930s Coventry remarkably includes a calling Collared Dove, a good 20 years before the species expanded its range into the UK.

In the end, I don't anticipate any radical improvement in the short term. Furthermore, far from indignation, could it be that these mistakes provide unexpected and malicious entertainment for birders! ■

David Waugh is a lifelong birder and ornithologist whose career has been in conservation, especially of threatened parrot species.

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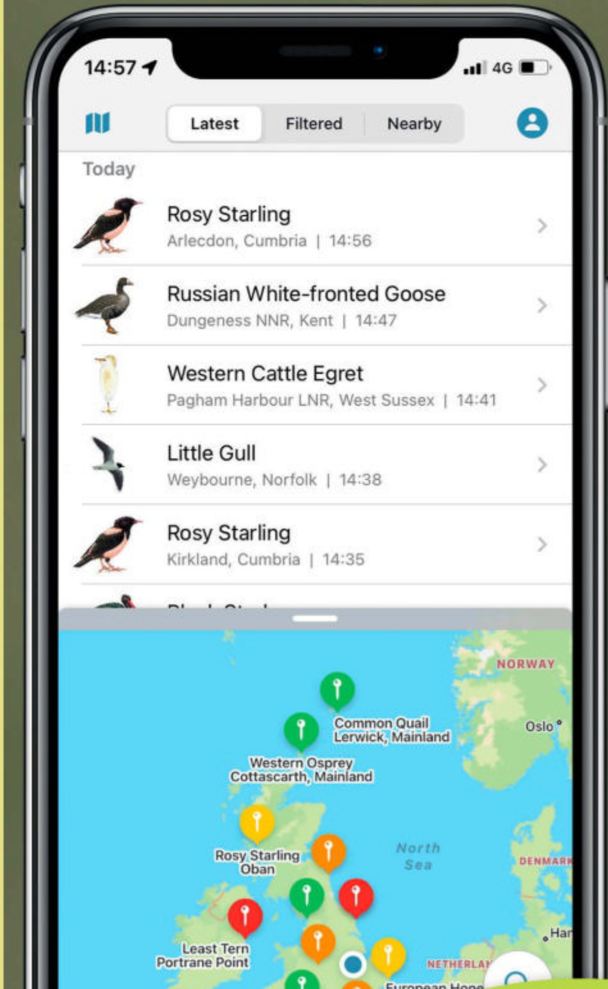

14:57

Latest Filtered Nearby

Today

Rosy Starling
Arlecdon, Cumbria | 14:56

Russian White-fronted Goose
Dungeness NNR, Kent | 14:47

Western Cattle Egret
Pagham Harbour LNR, West Sussex | 14:41

Little Gull
Weybourne, Norfolk | 14:38

Rosy Starling
Kirkland, Cumbria | 14:35

4G
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Oslo
Common Quail
Lerwick, Mainland
Western Osprey
Cottascarth, Mainland
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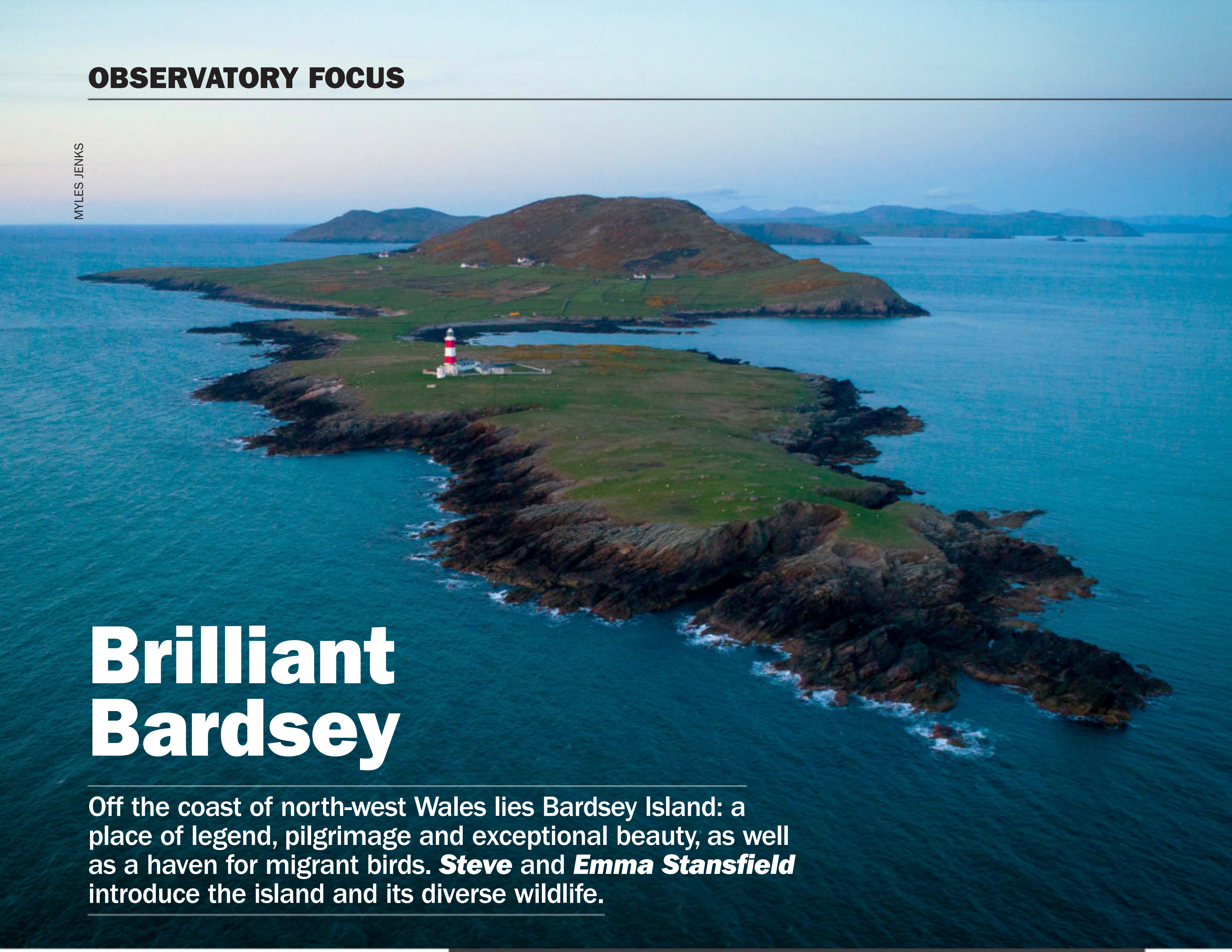

MYLES JENKS

Brilliant Bardsey

Off the coast of north-west Wales lies Bardsey Island: a place of legend, pilgrimage and exceptional beauty, as well as a haven for migrant birds. ***Steve*** and ***Emma Stansfield*** introduce the island and its diverse wildlife.

Situated in the Irish Sea off the tip of the Llŷn Peninsula, Bardsey Island is well positioned to attract migrants and vagrants from all points of the compass in both spring and autumn.

Bardsey Island, or Ynys Enlli in Welsh, is an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and is designated as a National Nature Reserve (NNR), a Special Protection Area (SPA), a Special Area of Conservation (SAC), and a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

Bardsey Bird and Field Observatory (BBFO) was established in 1953 and this year, 2023, celebrates its 70th anniversary. As well as recording bird migration and the monitoring and censusing of the island's avifauna and other wildlife, BBFO was instrumental in the purchase and protection of the island, and encourages interest in birds, wildlife and the island through its award-winning young birders and university weeks, educational guided walks and talks, numerous publications, internships and volunteering.

The island

Bardsey sits 3 km off the tip of the Llŷn Peninsula in Gwynedd and is accessible only by boat. Covering merely 180 ha, it is approximately 3 km long and 1 km wide, with cliffs, rocky and sandy beaches, grassland, heathland and wet marshes.

These habitats support a diverse range of birds, butterflies and other wildlife. The island consists of low-lying western and southern areas, which are flat, rich and fertile, and are farmed for conservation. This then rises to a relatively steep, gorse- and bracken-covered mountain to the east, at the base of which is the main track and all of the island's buildings except the lighthouse, which is at the southern end. The mountain then rises to 167 m before dropping steeply along its eastern face to produce an inhospitable grassy landscape and steep sea cliffs covered with many thousands of seabirds.

Holding some 30,000 pairs of Manx Shearwater, Bardsey is one of only a handful of major colonies, and is the fourth largest in the world. Observatory staff carefully monitor the shearwaters and make a full island census every six years, as well as other studies such as growth rates and satellite tagging. The island is also an important site for the charismatic Chough, of which up to nine pairs nest.

Bardsey is home to a variety of other wildlife including Grey Seals, of which more than 60 pups are born annually around the coastline of the island. Offshore, cetaceans are frequent, with Risso's Dolphins seen on most calm days from July to September.

The observatory

The fact that 2023 is the 70th anniversary of BBFO is tribute to the many dedicated enthusiasts and volunteers who, over the years, have given their passion and commitment to the observatory and the large-scale bird migration on the island. Thanks to them, it is still going strong today.

Few ornithologists had visited the island before the 1950s. However, O V Alpin, T A Coward and N F Ticehurst were among the first to discover and document bird migration on the island. Ticehurst wrote up his findings in *British Birds* in 1919. His visit revealed 'a remarkable migration of birds, many species of which had not been previously seen on the island. This included a number of scarcities including several Ortolan Buntings.'

He also noted 'a small colony of 20-30 pairs of Manx Shearwaters nesting on the island'. This study highlighted the potential of the island as a place of observation and research.

However, it wasn't until the island was rediscovered, ornithologically speaking, by Rupert Williams-Ellis (brother of Clough Williams-Ellis of Portmeirion fame) who saw its potential in the late 1940s, that the first practical steps to establishing the observatory were taken.

In 1951, Cecily and Rupert Williams-Ellis held a gathering of local people, with Skokholm Bird Observatory founder, Ronald Lockley, and William Condry representing the West Wales Field Society (WWFS), to discuss Rupert's proposal to establish an observatory on Bardsey. Although he passed away soon after, his efforts were not in vain.

Tony Norris, secretary of the West Midland Bird Club (WMBC), had stayed on Bardsey around this time, and he too had been struck by the possibility of a ringing station there. In 1952, members of WMBC and WWFS met with Alan Till, a lighthouse keeper on Bardsey who had previously been stationed on Skokholm (which had held an observatory since 1933). During his time there, Till had learnt a lot from Peter Conder and Ronald Lockley about the work of an island observatory.

On 7 March 1953, a meeting was held at The Ship Hotel in Aberdaron, and with the help of Cecily Williams-Ellis, Ronald Lockley, William Condry and Cecil Lambourne, an Observatory Council was formed representing four groups: islanders, interested people on the Caernarfonshire mainland, WMBC and WWFS, and pledged to "establish a permanent observatory on Bardsey for the study of natural history, particularly bird migration". They also hoped to preserve the island's fauna and flora, as well as encourage an intelligent interest in nature, especially among young people. One of their main objectives was to end the large-scale professional egg-collecting which had been so prominent in North Wales, and they also wished to ensure that the public would have access to Bardsey and to establish the island as an NNR.

Alan and Audrey Till were willing to help with the project, and with assistance from the BTO, the Society for the Promotion of Nature Reserves and the RSPB, the observatory was established. A month later, BBFO was the official tenant of the farmhouse buildings of 'Cristin' in the centre of the island. To ensure the observatory's success, Alan Till and his newly appointed assistant, Roy Thearle, began to observe and record the regular species on Bardsey as well as migrants. The BTO accepted Bardsey into its Bird Observatories Sub-Committee, which enabled BBFO to develop closer ties with other observatories.

Today, some 70 years later, the observatory is accredited to what has become the Bird Observatories Council, the public has had access to Bardsey since the 1970s, and the island is now an NNR among many other designations. The observatory is still based at Cristin, a 160-year-old farmhouse, with panoramic views from its terrace westward across the Irish Sea to the Wicklow Mountains some 100 km away, affording stunning sunset views.

The farm buildings have been converted and modernised into a research and visitor centre with self-

ALL PHOTOS BY STEVE STANSFIELD UNLESS STATED

Chough is a familiar sight on Bardsey throughout the year, with up to nine pairs nesting.

Perhaps Bardsey's most famous breeding bird is Manx Shearwater. With some 30,000 pairs calling the island their home, this is one of the world's largest colonies of the seabird.

MYLES JENKS

Bardsey on a sunny summer's day. This view shows the observatory and its grounds, which have hosted many rare birds over the years, looking south towards the island's famous lighthouse. On a clear day, the Wicklow Mountains in Ireland can be seen some 100 km away.

catering accommodation in 'the Lodge' for up to 14 guests in six comfy bedrooms and a well-equipped kitchen. The complex of buildings includes a library, common room, ringing room, accommodation for holidaymakers, researchers, staff and volunteers, plus displays and exhibitions showcasing the island's natural environment – and everyone is welcome!

Until recently, the observatory had been reliant upon a large diesel-guzzling generator to provide limited power for its buildings. However, in 2021 solar panels were installed, giving the site 24-hour power, making stays more comfortable than ever for guests, staff and volunteers.

The lighthouse

The lighthouse, until its change of mechanism to a red LED in May 2014, had a significant effect on the quantities of birds attracted to the island. Spring would see large numbers of northbound migrants enticed to the tower if they hit inclement weather over the Irish Sea at night, and consequently they were on the island at dawn. Birds in their thousands would twinkle like glitter in the five white beams of light, produced by its rotating catadioptric lenses. The light was visible from some 40 km and was a magnet for passing birds. Springtime counts there have included 1,700 Willow Warblers, 200 Common Whitethroats, 300 Grasshopper Warblers and 200 Spotted Flycatchers. It was a truly amazing sight which was carefully monitored by observatory staff.

In 1957, William Condry wrote: 'The crucial test of conscience arrives about midnight when a cold gale of rain is thrashing the windows and you are crawling thankfully to your snug little bed only to find that the warden is calmly gathering his boxes, rings and lamps and is about to set off for a night on the lighthouse balcony. Can you let him go alone with perhaps a couple of hundred birds to cope with before daybreak?'

Autumn at the lighthouse was even more impressive than in spring, with tens of thousands of birds being attracted. The largest 'fall' was in 2002 when some 40,000 birds were attracted on a single night, 30,000 of which were Redwings. Rarities such as Booted Warbler, Red-eyed Vireo and American Bittern were also drawn to the lighthouse in autumn.

Through the seasons

The season starts in mid-March when the staff return to the island. Much decorating and refurbishment is done between arrivals of northbound migrants, as the Lodge has stood cold and empty over the winter, bracing Atlantic storms and sometimes hurricane-force winds. As spring approaches, the winds abate and swing to the south and east, waves of Common Chiffchaffs and nominate Northern Wheatears arrive in early March, the latter replaced by the bolder Greenland birds in early to mid-April, with numbers increasing to up to 300 on occasion. March also sees the first returning hirundines, with Swallow numbers steadily increasing to peak occasionally in their thousands later in spring. Rarities in March are few, but can occur; Hoopoes, Hawfinches and Glaucous Gulls pale into insignificance compared to the Killdeer that was present at the south end of the island when staff returned in 1984!

In April, day visitors and guests staying at the Lodge start to arrive. As the month continues, Grasshopper Warblers, Common Whitethroats and Sedge Warblers make landfall in larger quantities. They are outnumbered by Blackcaps and Willow Warblers, whose numbers can reach more than 300 and 1,200 respectively in spring. Pied Flycatchers, Common Redstarts, Whinchats and Common Cuckoos all begin to pass through. May sees most of the common migrants becoming fewer, but good arrivals of Spotted Flycatchers can occur, with counts regularly in excess of 75. April rarities have included Pine Bunting and Snowy Owl.

Many of the island's birds settle down to breed in May. During the daytime, the western part of the island is alive with the sound of 80 pairs of nesting Eurasian Oystercatchers, while the song

Spring is a colourful time to be birding on Bardsey, with northbound migrants like this Pied Flycatcher in their breeding splendour.

Scarcities are a feature of late spring on the island, with Rosy Starling having occurred in the Junes of 2020 and 2021.

The most-twitched bird in Bardsey's history was this cracking male Cretzschmar's Bunting, present for 11 days in June 2015.

It's not just birds which make the island special. In summer, Risso's Dolphins are a regular sight offshore, with other cetaceans possible.

of Eurasian Wren is everywhere. The steep eastern cliffs become home to 2,500 pairs of Razorbills, 1,500 pairs of Guillemots, 250 pairs of Puffins and 300 pairs of Kittiwakes. European Herring and Lesser Black-backed Gulls, and European Shag, nest on the rocky shores of the east face, while 130 pairs of European Storm Petrels can be found nesting in crevices and burrows.

But the most abundant species to nest on the island, with some 30,000 pairs, is Manx Shearwater. Two thirds of these nest on the steep grass- and bracken-covered slopes, with the remainder on the lower, western side of the island.

May is also a great time for scarce migrants, with species such as Golden Oriole, Woodchat and Red-backed Shrikes and Bluethroat featuring, plus rarities including Western Orphean and Great Reed Warblers, Collared Flycatcher, Western Black-eared Wheatear, both Eastern and Western Subalpine Warblers (the former of which attempted to nest in 2009), Western Bonelli's and Greenish Warblers have all been recorded. Most recently, in May 2023, Bardsey's second Song Sparrow spent a day on the island.

Early June is the time of the year when anything can happen. Old records of megas such as Rock Bunting and Crested Lark, as well as the Cretzschmar's Bunting in 2015, whet the appetite. Additionally, this time has produced White-throated Sparrow, Sardinian and Paddyfield Warblers, Black-headed Bunting, regular Greenish, Blyth's Reed and Marsh Warblers, Rosy Starlings and the occasional Citrine Wagtail.

As a few late summer migrants just finish heading north, autumn passage is only a couple of weeks away. Eurasian Curlews begin to return in June, along with Northern Lapwings and Common Starlings. Passerine migration begins in mid-July with the first juvenile Willow Warblers arriving; these will peak in August, when up to 2,500 can be seen in a day. Whinchats, Pied Flycatchers and Common Redstarts all join in the early autumn mix, and Wrynecks and Melodious Warblers are frequent in August and early September. Late August also sees a congregation of up to 5,000 Kittiwakes covering the offshore rock of Carreg Yr Honwy, making it look snow-covered at times. These attract a good number of terns, with up to 600 Arctic, 500 Sandwich and smaller numbers of Common Terns. In turn these attract passing skuas; the sight of Arctic Skuas chasing through the flock can be an amazing spectacle.

September can see good arrivals of pipits and wagtails, including White Wagtails. With the common migrants in good flow, scarcer species such as Barred and Icterine Warblers, Common Rosefinch, Yellow-browed Warbler and Little and Ortolan Buntings are appetisers for the real rarities that can appear. These have included Great Snipe, Sora, Isabelline Wheatear, Lanceolated and River Warblers and Yellow-breasted Bunting, while at sea Fea's-type Petrel and Black-browed Albatross have passed among the commoner species, whose numbers can be extremely impressive. Up to 30,000 Manx Shearwaters have been noted in a single day, with a scattering of Balearic and Sooty Shearwaters mixed in. Thousands of Kittiwakes and Black-headed Gulls pass by together, while scarcities such as Sabine's Gull, Great Shearwater, Leach's Storm Petrel and Grey Phalarope reward the keen-eyed seawatchers.

October produces some of the largest movements of the year with thrushes and finches dominating – some 20,000 Chaffinches can pass through in a single morning. Seasonal scarcities appearing with some regularity include Red-breasted Flycatcher, Richard's Pipit, Pallas's and Radde's Warblers. It is also the prime month for rarities, with the likes of Blyth's Pipit, Eyebrowed Thrush and Isabelline and Pied Wheatears from the east, and Blackpoll Warbler (in 1968 and 1976), Common Yellowthroat (1996), Red-eyed Vireo (1985, 1998 and 2021), Rose-breasted Grosbeak (1983), Buff-bellied Pipit (2019) and Grey-cheeked Thrush (1961, 1968 and 1971) from across the Atlantic.

Bardsey has hosted two new species for Britain, both from North America, in the form of Summer Tanager in 1957 (still the only record for Britain) and American Yellow Warbler in 1964. Wales's first Red-flanked Bluetail, an adult male, was seen in October 2007.

November sees numbers begin to diminish, though passage in the early part of the month can still be quite impressive, with hundreds of Eurasian Skylarks being seen – and megas such as American Robin have occurred.

Visiting Bardsey

Visitors can explore the island's trails and paths, which lead to various lookout points, three small hides and over the mountain, providing excellent opportunities to see some of the island's wildlife and some stunning views.

The observatory provides wildlife walks, moth mornings, bird-ringing demonstrations and much more, including unforgettable night-time experiences among thousands of Manx Shearwaters. There is a near-daily boat service and a pub/café on the island serving food all day. ■

North American vagrants are a reasonably regular occurrence on the island, chiefly in autumn, with Buff-breasted Sandpiper having been seen on four occasions.

Isabelline Wheatear is one of a number of quality rarities to have been recorded on Bardsey on multiple occasions. This bird, in September 2019, was the third for the island.

Wales's first Red-flanked Bluetail – this superb adult male – was seen on 1 October 2007. Two further records have followed on the island, in the Octobers of 2015 and 2022.

Further information

- Find out more at **www.bbfo.org.uk**. For bookings, call **07855 264151** or email **stay@bbfo.org.uk**. To arrange boat trips, call **07971 769895** or visit **www.bardseyboattrips.com**.

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GOOD. BETTER. BUSHNELL.

NICK WATMOUGH

A Cornwall Birds outdoor meeting. Bird clubs have been an integral part of county and local birding for decades, but how are they faring in 2023?

The state of bird clubs in Britain

It is often said that local bird clubs make up the backbone of British birding, but what role do they have in 2023 – and how are they faring post-pandemic? We asked ***Keith Betton***, himself Chair of the Hampshire Ornithological Society, to check on the health of our many bird clubs and societies.

For me, my local bird club or society has always been important. I joined the London Natural History Society when I was 15, and remained a member into my late 20s until I moved to the Surrey-Hampshire border. Naturally I joined both the Surrey Bird Club and the Hampshire Ornithological Society (HOS). For me, the excitement of the annual bird report arriving is as acute today as it was in the 1970s! Both of these organisations have grown in size since I joined and HOS has managed to recruit 450 new members in the last three years – but is interest in bird clubs growing or falling, and are those who run these organisations finding the job is getting easier or not?

I sent a questionnaire to many of the country's main bird clubs and 50 of them sent me their thoughts. I have tried to group their comments in order to see the overall picture, but also to help them see how others are faring.

Membership is growing for most

First of all, I asked about membership and whether it has risen or fallen in the last 10 years. The good news is that 47% had grown in that time, while 27% had shrunk and a further 27% had seen no real change.

I went on to ask about life after COVID-19, and whether membership had changed since 2020. Again, it's good news – in fact better news. Some 53% had seen growth in the last three years and only 16% had seen a decline (31% reported no change). My own experience in Hampshire has been that a considerable number of people discovered nature in the lockdown periods, and although there was little point in joining a local club in 2020, many signed up in 2021, and birding became more of a focus.

Finding new members can be a challenge in areas where the community is scattered, but the Shoreham District Ornithological Society (SDOS) arranges events beside a local nature reserve where they set up telescopes and members are on hand to answer any questions from passers-by – some of whom join. It also has a Facebook page with more than 1,000 members, which is impressive given its own membership is around 200. SDOS sees itself as delivering on a mission, and expanding its reach to the general public and not just to members.

A warm welcome?

I wondered to what extent bird clubs make an effort to welcome new members. Most clubs issue a welcome pack, some sent the latest bird report, while others include leaflets on where to find birds and other helpful hints.

For example, the Sheffield Bird Study Group has a welcome e-newsletter for new members, which outlines the benefits of membership. This includes a welcome letter from the Chair, how to access the group's website, how to submit records and which species require a description, a guide to the best local sites, details on indoor meetings and field trips, as well as how to access the annual report and e-newsletter archive. Details of discounts for group members on optics and outdoor clothing are also provided. What more could you ask for?

But for many (particularly those who are new to birding) the thought of turning up at an indoor meeting or an outing can be daunting. Some clubs make a point of seeking out new members at meetings and making sure they are welcomed. That's easy in a small club, but a real challenge when membership runs into many hundreds. In Hampshire we launched a new idea at the end of 2021, and everyone who had joined HOS in the previous three months was invited to join some of the committee for coffee and biscuits at a hotel followed by a coastal walk. The take-up exceeded expectations and around 70% of invitees attended. This now happens every three months and already it seems to have increased retention.

LINCOLNSHIRE BIRD CLUB

The Lincolnshire Bird Club, pictured here at Birdfair, is one of the largest county clubs in Britain and has been active for nearly 45 years, publishing annual reports since then.

KEITH BETTON

The Hampshire Ornithological Society organises a minimum of six ringing events for its Young Members each year, which give attendees a chance to see birds up close.

Investing in the future

Local bird clubs have never attracted many young people, and they probably never will unless a major effort is made. Again, the good news is that 80% of clubs are offering some kind of incentive to younger members, but that means that 20% are offering nothing. Indeed, one club stated that members needed to be over 18 because none of the committee was qualified to accompany young people. To me, that's just giving up at the first hurdle!

Of those offering a reduction of some kind, just over half made membership completely free, which is great. Even if you ask for only £5, that is a barrier to attracting a young person, who will need to persuade a parent to pay up. A minority of other clubs limit the 'free' incentive to the children of existing members. That's such a shame. My parents were not interested in birds, and by closing the offer to other young people I believe some clubs are missing a great opportunity.

Most of the clubs responding had fewer than 5% of their membership of school or university age, and one club with 700 members admitted to having just 14 members under the age of 30. By comparison the Sheffield Bird Study Group has a membership of 400, of which 65 are under 25 and get free membership. It's worth bearing in mind that young members are probably happy to receive everything digitally – so they actually cost almost nothing to service.

Involving everyone

There are plenty of female birders out there, but many that I know are amazingly busy with other aspects of life, such as family and the community, and so do not attend bird club meetings. I also know from personal experience that some have attended and felt very much on the outside, surrounded by lots of middle-aged men who are not unfriendly, but probably don't naturally feel comfortable talking to a woman they don't know.

As a result, plenty of women I know just don't feel inclined to turn up –

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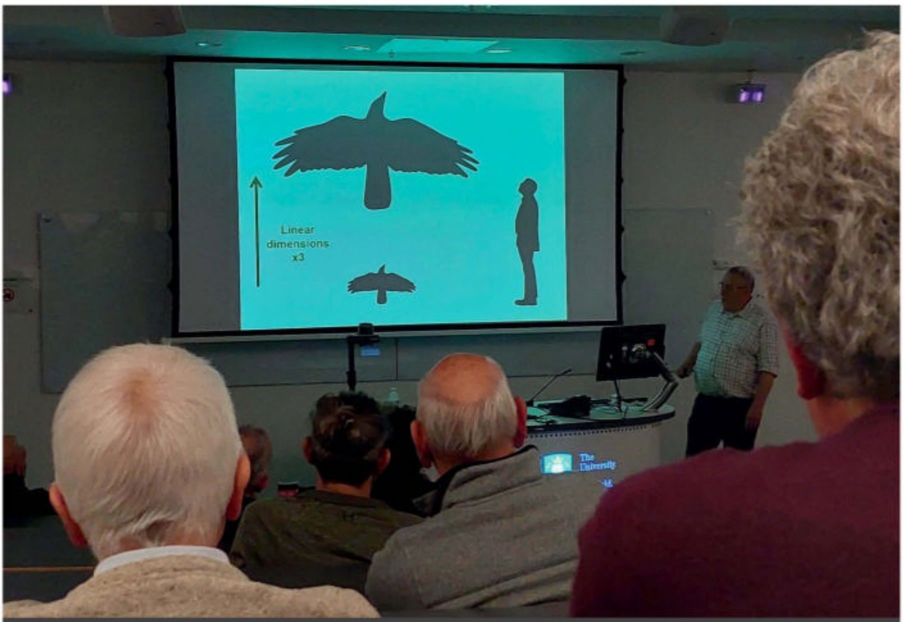

Members of the Sheffield Bird Study Group enjoy a talk. Meeting up in person has long been an important part of a bird club's activities – but how relevant is it in the age of Zoom?

JILL GREENWOOD

although they would if their female friends did. Several clubs have tried to remedy this but they are in the vast minority. In Hampshire we set up a WhatsApp group specifically for female members of HOS. It acts as a friendship group for around 70 members, and as a result female attendance at outings has risen, and of course it enables small groups to set up private birding trips. The Dorset Bird Club has now done the same, and several other clubs are thinking about it. A great result.

Badged items

You don't have to go too far back to remember a time when bird club sweatshirts and caps were widely used. But perhaps they have gone the same way as waxed jackets. Some 65% of bird clubs produce nothing, while of those who do sell items, a car sticker is often given free to new members and a small number have caps and sweatshirts made.

Those who do nothing cite storage space and stock turnover as the biggest obstacles. I used to cover my car in bird stickers, and now I have none. Maybe I have grown up a bit?!

Indoor meetings and Zoom

Most clubs still organise indoor meetings, although 34% report that attendance is falling, against 19% which report increases. With the arrival of COVID-19 in 2020 such meetings had to be cancelled and the advent of Zoom came to the rescue.

Some clubs embraced Zoom quickly and others took a while, but an astonishing 78% have tried it, and of those that did, the majority still use it for some meetings, and have managed to attract speakers who are from far away. Indeed, the Cheltenham Bird Club has hosted speakers from the USA and Australia, for example.

Some people have resisted Zoom, and 22% of clubs have not touched it. One respondent wrote: "We will never do Zoom, meetings are for meeting people!" By contrast, the Marylebone Bird Club now holds its entire lecture programme online.

Getting outdoors

I had always assumed that all clubs organise outings, but I was wrong. Surprisingly, 12% organise none, and 33% organise up to 10 meetings, but within that group several arrange a meeting every few months only.

On the other hand, a few organise 50 or more. Bristol Ornithological Club and the Marylebone Bird Club organise weekly meetings at the same popular sites, in addition to other trips. In spite of the variations above, 25% of clubs report an increase in attendance against the 15% which report a decline.

The recent growth in bird club membership reported above is surely responsible for the uptake in attendance, with those new to birding fuelling the interest. All of those offering walks feature local sites, and 66% venture beyond their own areas.

Surveys and conservation

An impressive 84% of clubs support surveys organised by the BTO, and 76% arrange surveys themselves. That is an impressive contribution to our local knowledge. Also, 76% produce a bird report of county or local sightings. This is a major financial burden for some clubs, with 80% of those creating a report still doing so in print.

Just over a third of those that do this also make it available as a digital option, while 13% have moved to digital-only. This trend will surely rise over time, although I have found resistance to online bird reports to be high. That said, I meet plenty of people who say they never read bird reports. You can't win, it seems!

Helping to fund local conservation initiatives remains a priority for most – even if only occasionally. Some 80% of clubs have funded projects, and some have helped the BTO and RSPB nationally. Of those which do fund work, 38% do so annually.

The Christchurch Harbour Ornithological Group watching Northern Goshawks on a guided walk.

CHRISTCHURCH HARBOUR ORNITHOLOGICAL GROUP

Keeping in touch

Regular communication with members via newsletters is still the main way of keeping everyone informed on activities, and almost every club has a website. The cost of printing and postage has seen 90% of clubs moving their newsletter online, although about half of those do make print copies available on demand.

One impressive development is the move to YouTube by the Essex Birdwatching Society, with presenters Matt Turner and Steve Grimwade giving a video rundown on the latest birding news and chat. As with any organisation, if you have members who will take on the challenge you can achieve almost anything.

IAN JULIAN

Some of the Hampshire Ornithological Society Young Members who presented on stage at the club's AGM, with Chris Packham among the audience.

IAN JULIAN

Female members of the Hampshire Ornithological Society sat with Juliet Vickery, CEO of the BTO (lower left), and Beccy Speight, CEO of the RSPB (second from left).

The stats

■ In the last 10 years has your membership size changed?

LARGER	47%
SMALLER	27%
NO CHANGE	27%

■ Same question, but in the last three years (ie since COVID-19)?

LARGER	53%
SMALLER	16%
NO CHANGE	31%

■ What offer (if any) do you make for young members?

FREE	43%
REDUCED	37%
NO OFFER	20%

■ How is attendance at your indoor meetings changing?

RISING	19%
FALLING	34%
NO CHANGE	47%

■ Have you offered Zoom talks in recent years?

YES BUT NOT NOW	30%
YES STILL DOING	49%
NO	23%

■ How is attendance at your outings changing?

RISING	25%
FALLING	15%
NO CHANGE	61%

■ Do you actively promote BTO surveys?

YES	84%
NO	16%

■ Do you organise your own surveys?

YES	76%
NO	24%

■ Is it getting harder to recruit volunteers for key committee roles?

HARDER	57%
EASIER	4%
NO CHANGE	39%

■ Do you ever support research or conservation activities with grants?

ANNUALLY	31%
OCCASIONALLY	49%
NO	20%

Help at hand?

But worryingly, getting people to volunteer is a major problem. Some 57% of clubs said that finding volunteers is becoming harder, and of the 39% who reported no change in volunteering, many admitted it had always been difficult to get help. As always the responsibility falls to a few, and over time they need to be replaced.

If you are a member of your local bird club, think about what you may be able to do to help. As someone who has always volunteered, I personally think it has added to my enjoyment of birding. Of course, many people have family to support and plenty of other personal challenges. But if you have the time, contact your local club and see what assistance it needs.

So, what is the future for our bird clubs? On the basis of this article, I'd say it's brighter than I had originally expected. Membership is rising for many, and attendance at outings is strong. Those clubs that have grasped opportunities such as Zoom have seen the benefits, but some are short of people who are comfortable with handling things like that. Most clubs are trying hard to attract new and younger blood and they are looking to the future.

The results of this *Birdwatch* survey show that bird clubs still play a very important role in the UK birding scene, and this looks set to continue in the coming years and well beyond. If you are not already a member of your local club, then why not join up? The future of local birding communities lies in our hands, should we choose to grasp it – and surely, we should. ■

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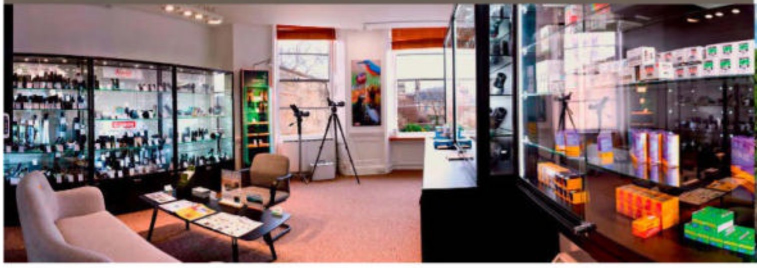

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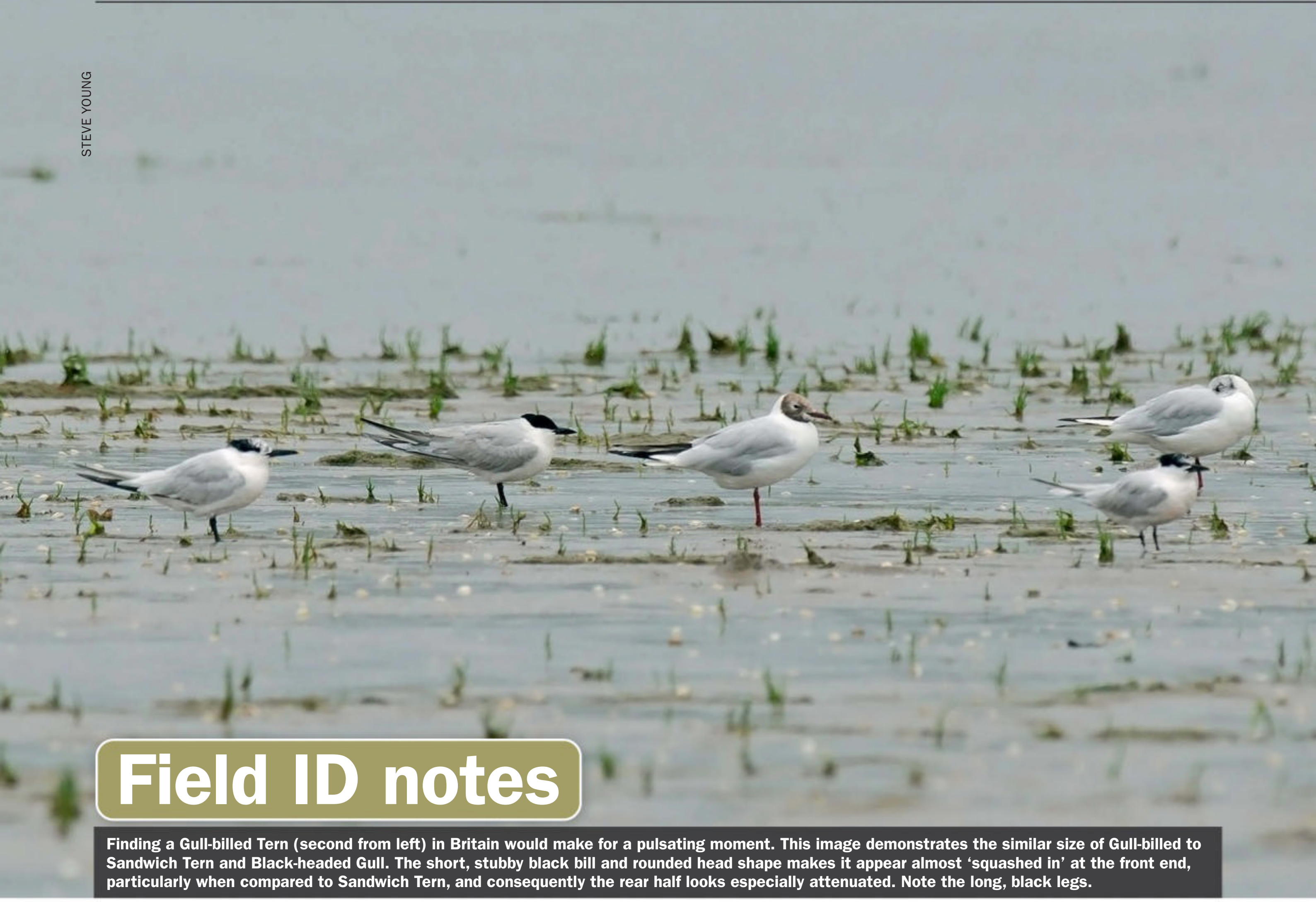

STEVE YOUNG

Field ID notes

Finding a Gull-billed Tern (second from left) in Britain would make for a pulsating moment. This image demonstrates the similar size of Gull-billed to Sandwich Tern and Black-headed Gull. The short, stubby black bill and rounded head shape makes it appear almost 'squashed in' at the front end, particularly when compared to Sandwich Tern, and consequently the rear half looks especially attenuated. Note the long, black legs.

Summer terns

Often perceived as the quietest period of the year for birding, midsummer is a fantastic time to be on the lookout for unusual terns when in the field, wherever you may be. *Josh Jones* examines some of the possibilities.

The long, sultry summer days are widely regarded as a time for birders to down tools and enjoy some respite ahead of autumn migration picking up into August. It is the height of the breeding season and, depending on the year, significant spells of June and July can be extremely quiet for notable finds – it's at this time that we routinely see the quietest days (in terms of volume of news) on the BirdGuides sightings page. Unless you live near a productive coastal wetland, expect most of your patch visits to be steady – there can be long periods without a notable bird appearing and just the regular breeding species for company.

Understandably, then, the prospect of spending many hours in the field with potentially very little reward puts many people off birding during this period – but write it off at your peril! My mantra during these months is that it only takes one bird to make everything worthwhile – and often at this season, that bird can be of real quality.

Tern time

Having access to a nearby wetland at this time of year is certainly beneficial, as many of the exciting waifs recorded at this season – from *Acrocephalus* warblers (see *Birdwatch* 360: 31-35) to various waterbirds – are associated with such habitats. And while rare waders are always on my mind during the longest days of the year, it is in fact terns that I most strongly associate with this period.

July has long been considered the 'classic' month for rare terns to appear across Britain – all but three of the 19 species on the BOU's British list have occurred in this month. Colonies are in full swing and have an innate ability to attract wandering rarities, while later in July, post-breeding roosts begin to form and possess a similar magnetism for exciting visitors. With a range of interesting plumages and forms to study among the commoner species, focusing attention on these birds is a great way to spend a July day's birding.

The scope of this article is not to cover all 16 tern species seen in Britain in July, but

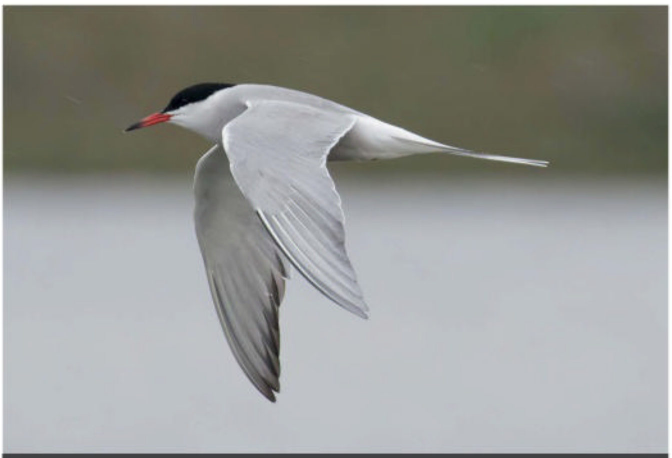
PROFILE

JOSH JONES is Editor of *Birdwatch*. He has been an avid birder since a young age, with a particular fondness for waders, gulls and terns.

KEY FEATURED SPECIES

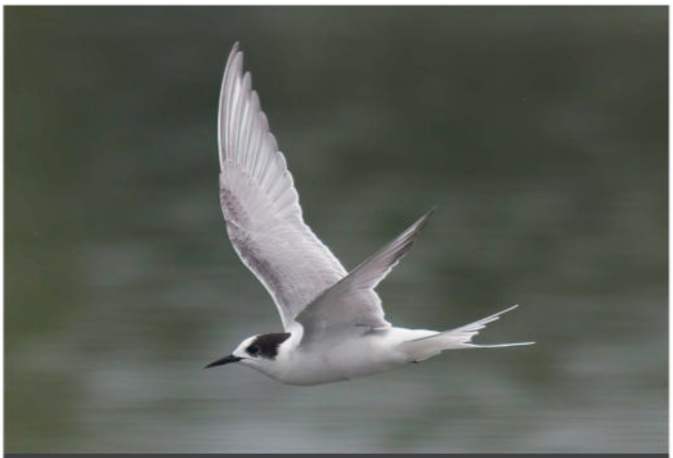
- Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*
- Arctic Tern *Sterna paradisaea*
- Roseate Tern *Sterna dougallii*
- Little Tern *Sternula albifrons*
- Caspian Tern *Hydroprogne caspia*
- Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica*

JOSH JONES



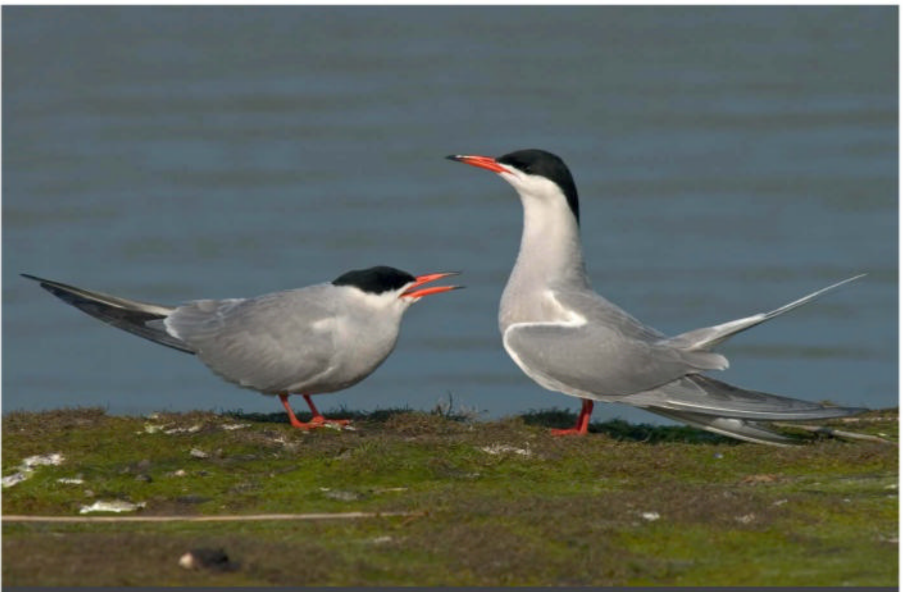
This image nicely demonstrates the flight structure of Common Tern, with relatively broad wings and a fairly long-looking head and bill. Note also the moult contrast in the primaries, creating a dark 'wedge' on the upperwing. The tail streamers are of medium length.

JOSH JONES



This second-calendar-year Arctic Tern looks altogether daintier and more graceful than the preceding Common Tern, with a shorter bill, smaller head and body, and longer and narrower wings. The tail streamers are already fairly long, appearing to 'drift' behind the bird.

MARC GUYT (WWW.AGAMI.NL)



With its black-tipped, orange-red bill, medium-length red legs and greyish body and upperwings, adult Common Tern is a familiar sight across Britain during the summer months.

instead to focus on some of the species and plumages that may realistically be encountered just about anywhere, from a landlocked lake to a coastal estuary, at this time of year. These range from common and familiar to rare (but annual) vagrants.

The species

Of the six species covered here, Common Tern is the 'default' option, being a widespread and familiar summer visitor to both freshwater and saline habitats: it may be encountered just about anywhere in Britain between April and August. It has a stable population of some 11,000 pairs and is the only tern to readily nest inland in Britain. Its distribution has increased in recent decades as wetland restoration and creation have provided it with new opportunities, compensating the losses noted at larger, coastal colonies.

The next-most readily encountered is Arctic Tern. In fact, this species has a much larger British breeding population than Common Tern, amounting to approximately 54,000 pairs, but here it is an exclusively coastal nester and almost entirely restricted to the north, with the majority found in the Northern Isles and Hebrides. Further south (and especially inland) it is more readily regarded as a passage migrant, chiefly in spring (between mid-April and mid-May), but also to a lesser degree in autumn. Here we will focus on the second-calendar-year plumage (often referred to by the old moniker, 'portlandica') that is infrequently encountered during the summer months.

Little Tern is a scarce summer visitor to Britain, with a breeding population of some 1,500 pairs restricted to a relatively small number of coastal colonies. However, on the Continent, it routinely breeds inland, particularly in riverine habitats. Although regularly encountered around many British coasts, it is scarce in freshwater habitats and constitutes a real prize for the inland patchwatcher. While birds may be seen inland from April onwards, this species often seems to appear 'randomly' during June and July – in my experience, the first 10 days of June seems to be a particularly good time to encounter one at an inland site.

Roseate Tern is Britain's rarest nesting seabird. Intensive conservation measures at its only British colony – Coquet Island in Northumberland – saw the number of pairs rise to 150 in 2021, but these birds were severely impacted by an avian influenza outbreak in 2022 and numbers were down by more than half in spring 2023. A larger breeding population is found in Ireland, where more than 1,700 pairs bred at Rockabill, Co Dublin, in 2021; interchange between the British and Irish colonies is well known, demonstrating how this species will routinely wander. It is more strictly maritime than the previously mentioned species, being particularly rare inland – a status exacerbated by the relatively low numbers overall in north-west Europe. However, occasional inland records are registered, usually between May and July and from large waterbodies such as reservoirs.

Caspian Tern has a curious world distribution, being found on most continents but in often small and sporadic populations. In Europe, its core distribution is around the Baltic (1,700 pairs) and Black Sea (1,000 pairs). It is a rare but annual vagrant to Britain, with 2020 and 2021 being particularly good years. It is typically nomadic, with one or a few individuals often accounting

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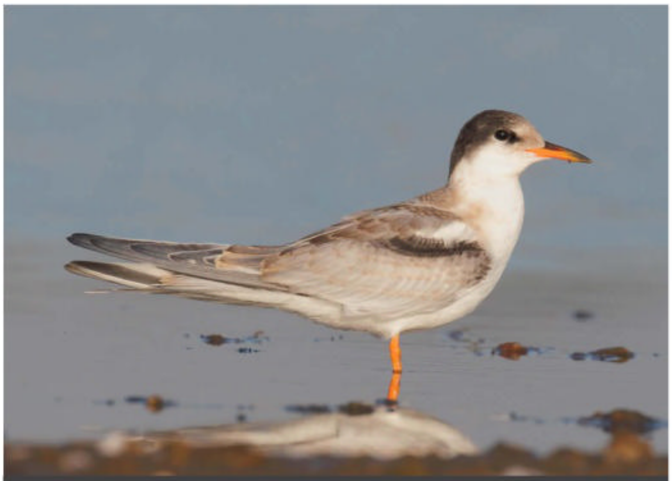
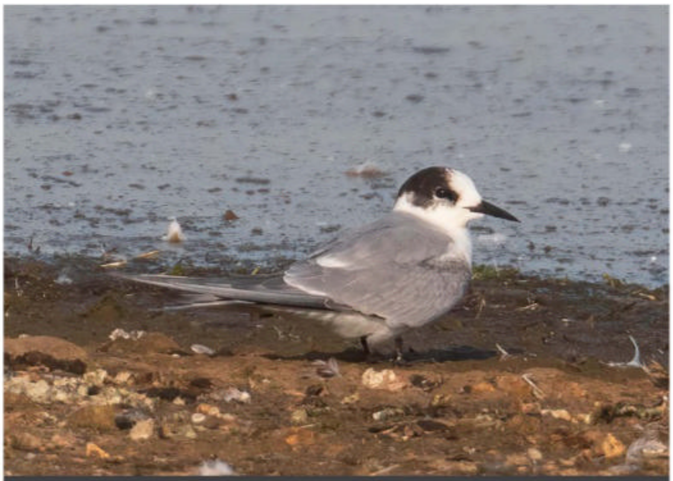

JOSH JONES

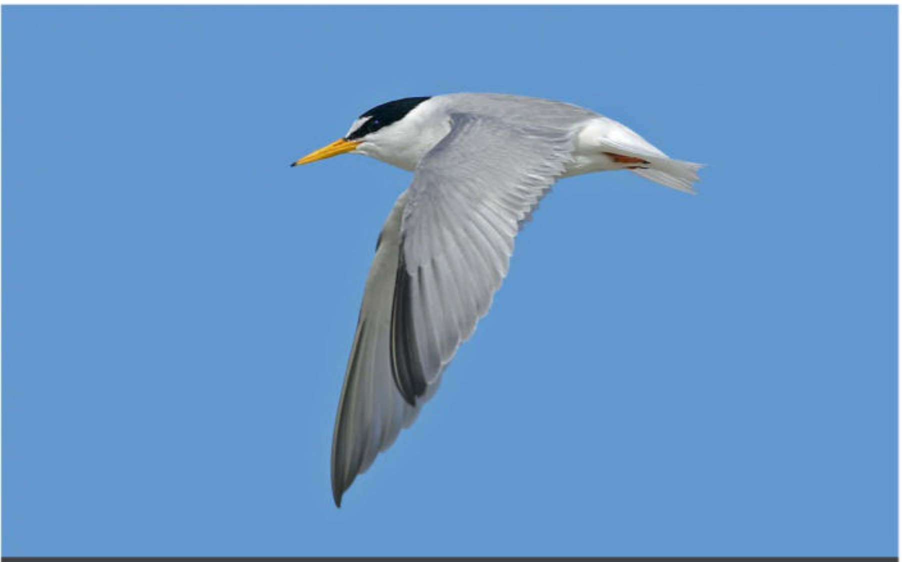
This image illustrates Common Tern's structure nicely. With its orange legs and bill base, pale forehead, gingery upperparts and dark carpal bar, this is a juvenile. The bill is not yet fully grown and appears short.


JOSH JONES

This second-calendar-year Arctic Tern looks comparatively petite at rest, with its short, fine bill, 'neckless' appearance and short legs. It can be aged by the 'half hood' and black bare parts.

for sightings at multiple widespread sites, and it turns up at both coastal and inland localities. June and especially July are the peak months for sightings in Britain, usually involving failed- or non-breeding adults. The Baltic population is presumed to be the primary source of British Caspian Tern records, a notion confirmed by sightings of colour-ringed birds from Swedish and Finnish colonies.

Gull-billed Tern is another vagrant to Britain. With a few individuals recorded annually, it is of similar rarity to Caspian Tern. As with that species, it has a worldwide distribution, and is a widespread breeder across Europe (16,000-21,000 pairs). The biggest populations are in Spain, Ukraine and European Russia, but it is found widely in southern Europe in small numbers. As with Caspian Tern, it can be nomadic and will appear at both coastal and inland localities. Although May holds the highest number of reports, July (68 records) is statistically the second-best month to find one, with June and August also having produced more than 50 records apiece.


MARKUS VARESVUO (WWW.AGAMI.NL)

Little Tern is distinctive due to its tiny size, but other obvious features to look for include the yellow bill, white forehead patch and very short tail. The flight action is rather frenetic.

Identification

When it comes to recognising unusual terns, having a familiarity with the appearance, behaviour and vocalisations of Common Tern is crucial. This is a medium-sized tern; adults show a black cap and an orange-red bill with contrasting black tip in breeding plumage. The bill and head are relatively long, appearing reasonably 'drawn out', with an obvious neck. The plumage is overall pale grey, being whiter around the neck and face. At rest, the legs are of medium length and a dull red colour.

In flight, this species has relatively broad wings that are held at a sharp angle at the carpal joint. The flight action appears quite stiff, with pulsating wingbeats. From below, a broad dark trailing edge is apparent on the primaries, while the inner primaries are translucent. From above, moult contrast in the primaries is noticeable, with the older, retained outer primaries appearing distinctly darker when compared to the fresher inner primaries, creating a dark 'wedge'.

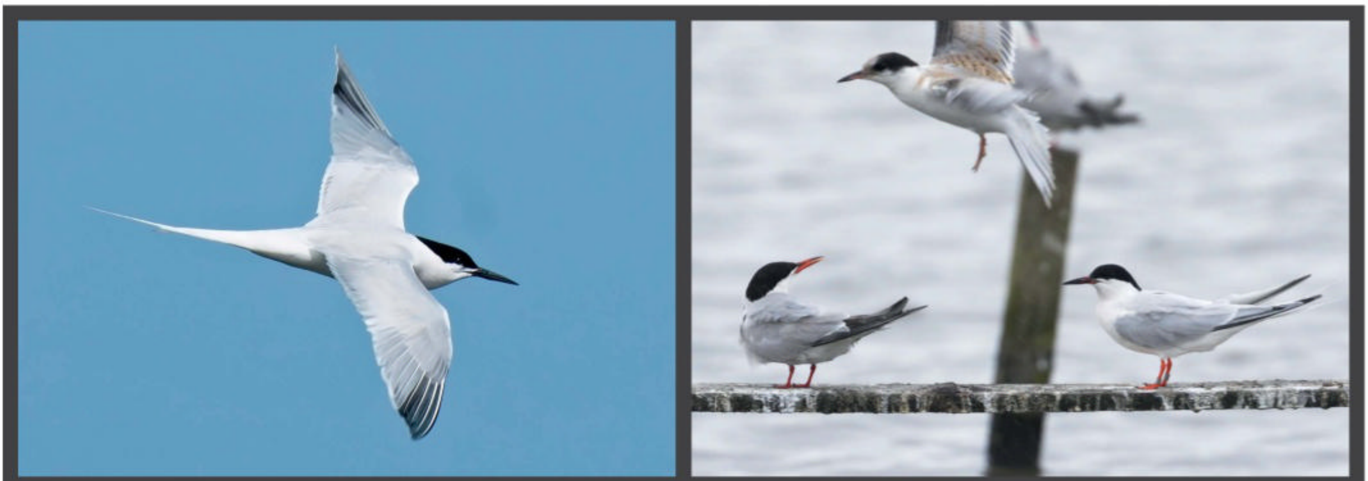
Juveniles, which will begin to appear as July progresses, have gingery upperparts, while the forehead is pale and the bill is dark with an extensive orange base.

In many areas, this species will be near to breeding sites and thus adults tend to be quite vocal, with a sharp *kit* and longer *kieri-kieri-keir* among the typical calls given. Fledged juveniles give high-pitched begging calls as they follow their parents around soon after fledging.

Adult Arctic Tern tends to be scarce away from northern colonies in summer, especially inland, thus is not covered here. However, second-calendar-year (first-summer) birds occur in small numbers and these make for an interesting midsummer ID challenge, as they may look very like similar-aged Common Tern, which also appears in Europe (albeit more rarely).

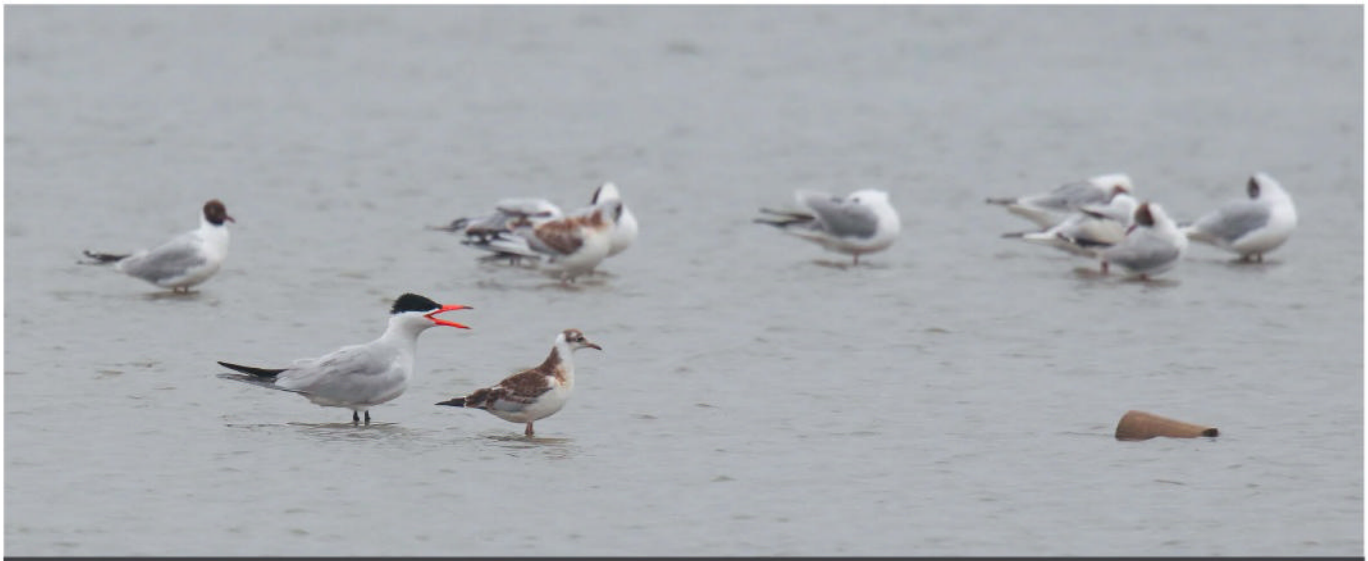
When confronted with an immature Common or Arctic Tern in summer it is important to carefully assess the bird's structure, for this will hold strong clues as to which species it is – plumage can be very similar. Arctic Tern has relatively longer- and narrower-looking wings than Common, with less of an angle at the carpal. The rear body looks shorter, the head smaller, neck shorter, bill shorter and daintier, and tail longer. Overall, this contributes to the impression of a more elegant and lightweight bird than Common Tern,

LEFT: STEVE YOUNG; RIGHT: RALPH MARTIN (WWW.AGAMI.NL)



In spring, adult Roseate Terns have all-black bills (above left), but a variable reddish base becomes apparent in late summer (above right, right bird). In flight, adults look relatively short winged and long tailed, with a distinctive dark wedge in the outer primaries. At rest, the bright red legs can be seen, while the overall colour of the bird is clearly more whitish than Common Tern, which appears duller and greyer by comparison.

MARK RAYMENT



Caspian Tern is a truly impressive bird. When seen at rest, it dwarfs Common Terns and makes Black-headed Gulls look small. The bill is huge and bright red with a variable dark tip. The legs are black. The cap is black in summer adults, but immatures show a streaked crown and forehead.

appearing more 'fluid' and nimbler in flight. Even on immature birds, which lack the long tail streamers of adults, the outer tail feathers are still noticeably longer than in similar-aged Common and can appear to have an agenda of their own, 'bouncing' or 'flowing' freely behind the bird. At rest, Arctic is noticeably shorter legged and looks small and squat compared to Common.

Breeding-plumaged adult Roseate Tern is a truly beautiful bird, its desirability further enhanced by its relative scarcity in Britain. Similar in size to Common Tern, this species is whiter overall, with the breast often showing a pale pink flush. The bill is black in spring, but a variable red base usually develops from July onwards. The legs are bright red. At rest, the long tail streamers extend beyond the primary tips (although note that these are moulted in late summer, creating a shorter-tailed impression). The inner primaries are whitish and contrast strongly with blackish outer primaries, which form a very distinct narrow dark wedge when seen in flight.

Due to its relatively short wings, Roseate Tern flies with faster and shallower wingbeats compared to Common and Arctic Terns, giving it a 'busier' and more direct flight action. The call is a very distinctive, excitable *kivvik* that sounds like a cross between Spotted Redshank and Sandwich Tern. It's well worth knowing this as it can be a good way to pick birds up in mixed tern flocks – in late July 2019, I located an adult Roseate in a flock of Commons on the River Thames in East London by hearing the call.

Barely more than half the size of a Common Tern, Little Tern has no realistic confusion species and is a straightforward identification when encountered. It looks positively tiny both at rest and in flight, with a 'clockwork toy' flight action with very fast wingbeats. When seen well, the yellow bill with black tip and yellow-orange legs will be apparent, as is a neat white patch on the forehead.

Caspian Tern is the world's largest tern species. It is a similar size to Lesser Black-backed Gull and looks positively huge when seen alongside Common Terns. It stands taller when seen among Black-headed Gulls, with adults showing a neat black cap and huge, bright red bill (with a variable diffuse dark tip). Immatures can show some black flecking or streaking in or around the cap. The upperparts are pale grey, underparts whitish and the legs long and black. The tail is short and slightly forked. In flight, the underside to the primaries shows an extensive dark 'shadow' and the flight action is powerful yet leisurely. It is an impressive bird to watch hunting and dives for fish from considerable height.

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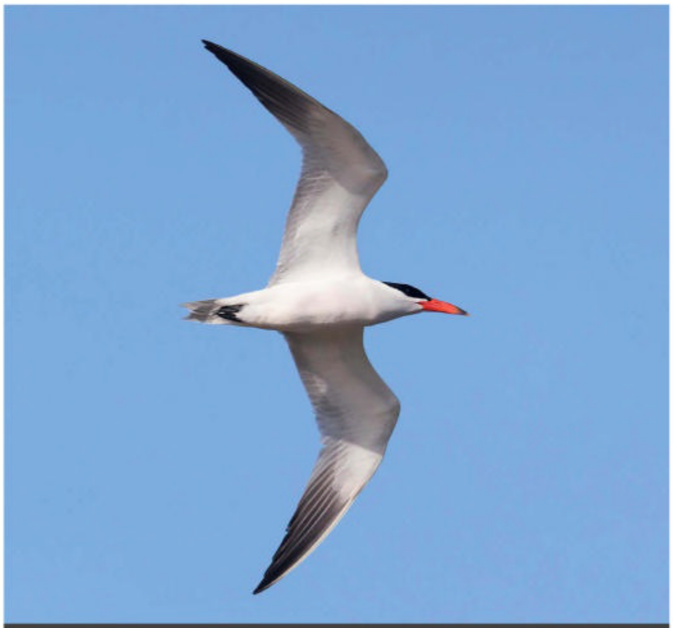
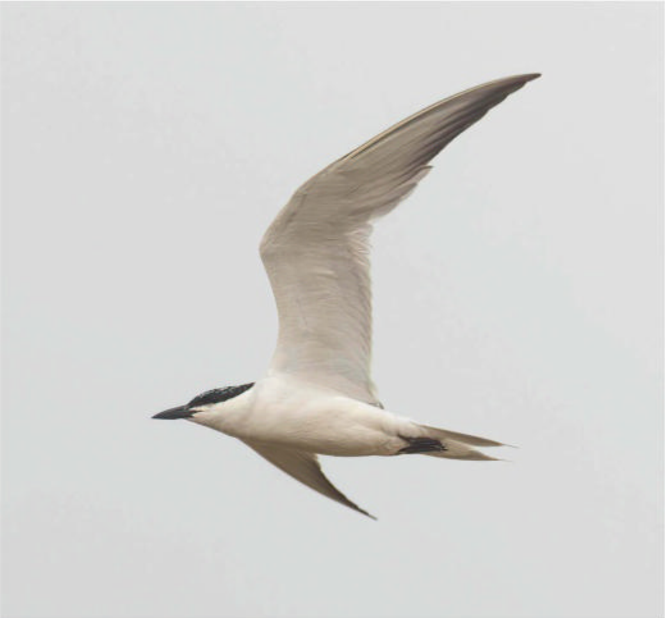


PAUL SAWER

This image captures the imposing structure of Caspian Tern in flight, emphasised by its hefty bill, broad wings, well-built body and short tail. Note the extensive dark 'shadow' to the underside of the primaries.



JOSH JONES

Gull-billed Tern looks impressive on the wing, having a leisurely flight action as it hunts insects high in the sky. This bird is beginning to moult into winter plumage, with the cap speckled with white.

Gull-billed Tern is approximately the size of a Black-headed Gull. This means it is a 'size up' from Common Tern and, coupled with its long (for a tern) black legs, appears noticeably bigger than that species when perched. It is of similar size to Sandwich Tern (not covered here), but that species is slimmer and more elegant, while Gull-billed appears more compact. In flight, it looks robust with broader wings and a shorter tail. The tail fork is shallow, the upperparts are a darker grey than Sandwich Tern and the rump and uppertail are also grey. The all-black bill is short and stout, the head is rounded (lacking a crest) and there is usually a distinct dark trailing edge to the primaries. This aerial feeder has a leisurely flight action, hunting large insects such as dragonflies over fields or treetops as readily as it does over wetlands.

Tips for the field

Rare and unusual terns are notorious for being tricky to catch up with, for they are wide ranging and often short staying. They are also unpredictable in their appearances and a significant element of luck is required to find them.

The best bet is to watch a wetland site that holds feeding, loafing or breeding terns and gulls, ideally with suitable shallows or islands for roosting. If you're inland, identify a waterbody near you that routinely attracts good numbers of feeding Common Terns – if it's enticing for that species, then it's well placed to bring in scarce visitors, too.

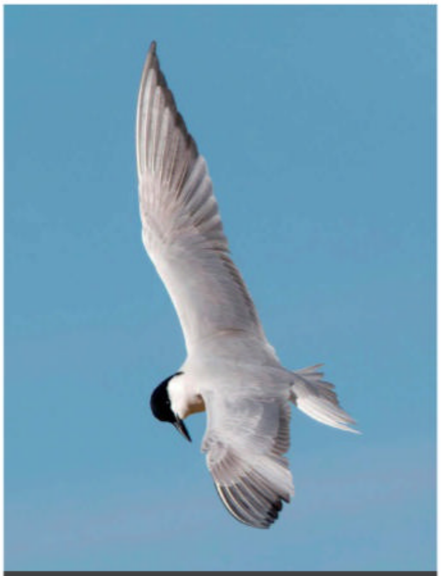
Caspian Tern in particular is renowned for its one-day stays. Ringed birds have demonstrated just how far the species will wander in short spaces of time, although they will often return to the same sites periodically to roost before departing on further feeding trips. Similarly, Gull-billed Tern is naturally very mobile, with feeding forays often lasting for hours before they return to a favoured roost site.

Regular checking is important where possible, as these birds may only call in for brief periods – for example, I found a Caspian Tern on my local patch in late June 2020 at 10 pm (it wasn't present a few hours earlier) and it had departed by 4.20 am the next morning, never to be seen again! In recent years, this same shallow gravel pit has produced another Caspian Tern (July 2017) and a Gull-billed Tern (July 2022). Both could be absent for long periods while hunting.

There is no exact science to the weather conditions behind summer tern movements, particularly as birds are often travelling alone in 'random' fashion. But, as an inland birder, I find that humid spells with overnight thunderstorms or murk are good 'tern-producing' conditions. This seems to be particularly true for Little Tern, which has a habit of appearing inland on calm, muggy and cloudy mornings after overnight storms. Recently, in May 2023, I came across a Roseate Tern – the first locally for almost 40 years – in such conditions.

Terns also seem to be early risers – there have been numerous incidences in my local area where unusual species are found in the first couple of hours after dawn, having arrived overnight, but quickly move on. This perhaps doesn't matter so much at coastal sites, but birds are likely to be tidal here – getting to know their habits, such as feeding and roosting areas, in response to tide state is key to maximising your chance of a good find.

Of course, the quiet midsummer weeks quickly pass and give way to the onset of autumn migration from August onwards, when many birders will redouble their field efforts. But during this somewhat sleepy period, don't give up on birding altogether – the potential for a quality find or two remains surprisingly high. ■



BILL BASTON

Gull-billed Tern has a short tail with only a slight fork, while the rump and uppertail are grey. Note the distinct dark trailing edge to the primaries.

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JON HEATH

Much ancient fenland has been lost since widespread drainage of The Fens took place in the 19th century, although wildlife-rich areas of marsh, seasonal floodplain and reedbed still exist across the area. This is the Cam Washes, situated west of Wicken in Cambridgeshire.

Britain's waterbird wonderland

Although intensively managed for agriculture, The Fens hold an impressive array of special wildlife, including some of the UK's rarest breeding birds and huge numbers of wintering wildfowl. *Jon Heath* profiles this unique region.

Incorporating the low-lying region inland of The Wash, The Fens are often unfairly thought of as bleak, flat areas with endless arable fields. Trees and hedgerows seem few and far between and the land might appear uniform and uninteresting. But this is also a region of big skies, impressive washlands and ancient marshes, complete with their own unique wildlife.

Stretching for almost 4,000 sq km across parts of south Lincolnshire, Cambridgeshire, Norfolk and Suffolk, this region has been altered by humans for thousands of years. It was once vast and impenetrable marshland, rich in biodiversity. Although much of the former wetlands have been lost to modern drainage systems with the resulting fertile soil used for much-needed cultivation, biodiverse habitats do remain and are home to the UK strongholds of many species. These areas provide great interest for the birder and more general wildlife enthusiast throughout the year.

Looking back through time

Historically, fenland landscapes were in flux throughout the year, with variable water levels delivering different habitats and wildlife. Centuries ago, flocks of lekking Ruff and colonies of Black Terns were probably a common sight, while fossil evidence suggests Dalmatian Pelicans and White-tailed Eagles made The Fens their home. For people, this was a challenging place to live. Archaeological digs have revealed that the first people to arrive here constructed hunting walkways through reedbeds, similar to the boardwalks which take us around reserves. In medieval times, humans made the most of the environment by pastoral farming and harvesting reeds and sedges for thatch. For centuries their lives were in harmony with nature, supplemented through wildfowling and fishing from what would have been a bounteous land.

Although attempts to drain The Fens began as long ago as Roman times and continued throughout the Middle Ages, the first 'great draining' did not happen until the 17th century. Headed by the Earl of Bedford in 1630, a group of wealthy landowners set out to expose fertile peat soils for summer cultivation and help prevent damaging winter flooding. Over the next 70 years engineers constructed the Old and New Bedford Rivers along with Denver Sluice, which drained vast fenland areas into The Wash – these are still some of the largest man-made landscape features in England. The bulk of fenland draining occurred in the early 19th century with the advent of new steam drainage technology.

Species loss and recovery

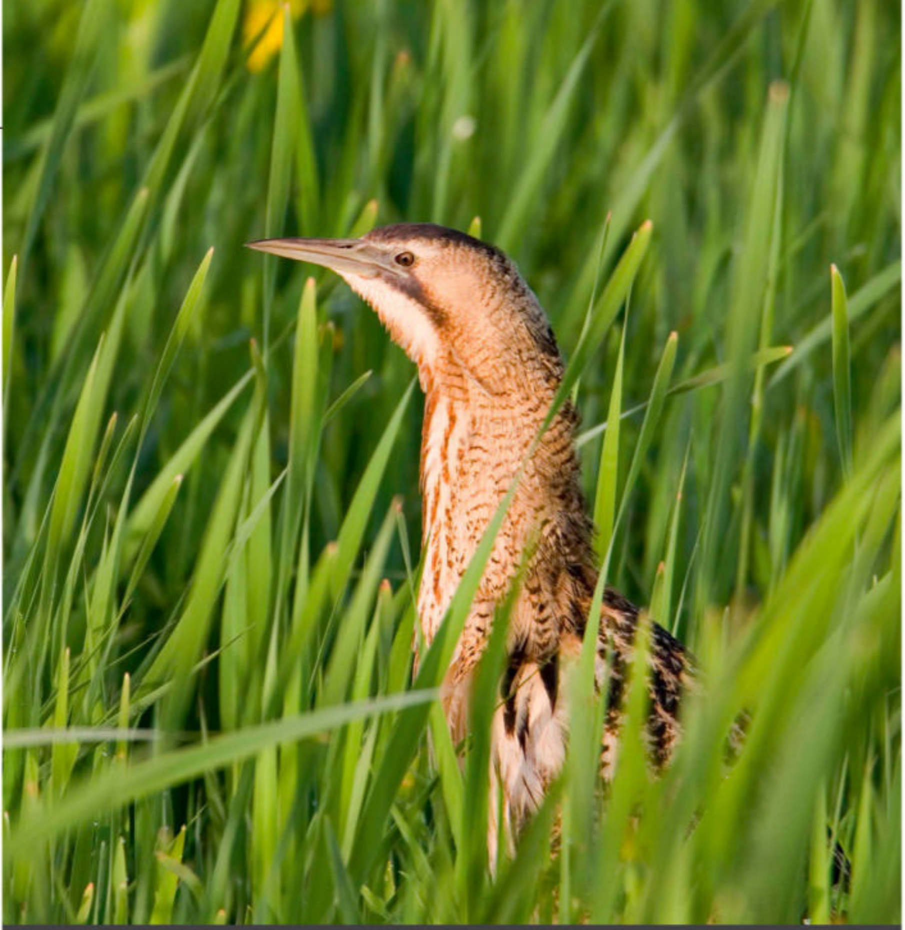
Drainage caused huge areas of wetland habitats to be destroyed or altered, leading to the loss of much of the wildlife that depended on these environments. Many species, for a time, disappeared altogether – Eurasian Bittern and Western Marsh Harrier became extinct in Britain in the late 19th century. However, restoration of wetlands has increased in recent years and, along with other factors, has led to the recovery of several key species.

After recolonising Britain in 1911, Eurasian Bittern increased to around 80 booming males in 1954, but by 1997 was once again on the brink of extinction with only 11 booming birds. RSPB-led projects between 1996 and 2006 concentrated on restoring reedbeds – bitterns' favoured habitat. Much of the work involved raising water levels and reshaping pools, encouraging more fish prey to help breeding success. The population has increased rapidly since the conservation work and in 2022 an annual survey recorded a minimum of 228 booming males. Although this species remains both scarce and elusive, there are now many sites in The Fens where you can see or hear them.

Western Marsh Harrier has also experienced a strong recovery, making it one of the greatest conservation success stories in The Fens in recent times. Having made a return in the 1920s, persecution reduced numbers once more so that, by 1971, only a single pair was left. Bans on the use of toxic pesticides, crackdowns on illegal shooting and egg collecting, plus the ongoing restoration of reedbeds, have helped these birds of prey to recover. By the 1990s numbers had increased to around 100 pairs and currently the UK population is estimated at 600-700 pairs, with birds spreading northwards. It is now not uncommon to encounter the mesmerising 'skydancing' display in The Fens. Displaying males fly to an extraordinary height before tumbling down and are often first noticed by their odd whining call, reminiscent of a wader.

Arguably the most exciting bird to return to the fenland landscape in recent times is Common Crane. This huge and charismatic species was lost in the 17th century, largely due to hunting but also coinciding with the first major draining events. In the late 1970s a small number of wild cranes returned to the Norfolk Broads. This population has slowly spread into parts of The Fens, benefitting from restoration work to improve favoured habitat at sites such as the Nene Washes, Cambridgeshire, and Lakenheath Fen, Suffolk.

Common Cranes take three to six years to reach sexual maturity, then form strong monogamous bonds with a mate. Courtship, while seldom seen, is a spectacular dancing display with loud and far-carrying calls which can be heard kilometres away across the flat landscapes. A clutch of two eggs is usually laid in April and the recently hatched young are very vulnerable in their first weeks. This means that breeding success can be quite low, although cranes are long-lived birds and can make many breeding attempts during their lifetimes – one well-monitored fenland Common Crane pair is already known to have fledged eight young from nine breeding attempts. As of 2022 the fenland crane breeding population stood at 14 pairs, with more spread between the Norfolk Broads, south-west England and other satellite populations.


PAUL SAWER

After flirting with extinction in Britain on two occasions, Eurasian Bittern is once again flourishing here. The extensive wetlands of The Fens are a stronghold for this elusive bird.

JON HEATH

Barn Owl is one species that has fared well in the intensively farmed landscapes of The Fens.

Seasonal highlights

Winter is an exciting time to visit The Fens. It is usually the wettest period, with varying amounts of standing water creating opportunities for waterbirds. The collective fenland bird population increases as migratory wildfowl escape the cold of northern and central Europe. Arable fields suddenly turn white as Whooper Swans arrive from Iceland to make the most of leftover crops. The soft calls of family groups arriving to feed are one of the most joyous sounds of the area in winter.

In the evening most swans make for the safety of the large washlands at the Nene and Ouse Washes. Welney WWT is a fabulous place to experience roosting swans, with close-up views from a heated observatory during the daily winter feeds. It is worth scrutinising the

❯

Whooper Swan flocks for a chance to see the smaller Bewick's Swan. Sadly, in recent times, this species has been seen in much-reduced numbers. Bewick's are now 'short-stopping' during autumn migration, preferring instead to stay on the Continent in the milder winters.

Winter also heralds a waterfowl spectacle at the Nene and Ouse Washes. Huge flocks of dabbling Eurasian Wigeon, Northern Pintail, Eurasian Teal and Northern Shoveler are attracted to the floodwaters, bringing with them the occasional vagrant: Green-winged Teal, American Wigeon and Ring-necked Duck are near annual. Swirling winter flocks of Northern Lapwing are regular along the washes, along with thousands of shimmering European Golden Plovers. If the conditions are right, Icelandic Black-tailed Godwits will also stop to feed during early spring. Periodically they build into flocks several thousand strong, attracting the attention of marauding Peregrine Falcons and other raptors.

A trip to the washes on a calm summer evening can also be a memorable event, with a chorus of warblers, Common Cuckoos and displaying waders. If water levels are right the washes become alive with the raucous calls of Common Redshank and Northern Lapwing, while eerie 'drumming' sounds come from dive-bombing Common Snipe high in the sky. Lucky observers may experience a rare Black-tailed Godwit display – a rhythmic succession of nasal calls followed by a complex display flight.

The Cambridgeshire washes are the primary UK location for the small breeding population of *limosa* Black-tailed Godwits. This is another species that declined due to fenland draining, although the population had recovered to 65 pairs at the Ouse Washes in the 1970s. However, in recent years, unpredictable spring and summer flooding has severely affected the population. By 2017 the situation at the Ouse Washes had become critical, with only three breeding pairs remaining, and they were also in decline at the Nene. The same year the RSPB and WWT teamed up to help increase the fenland population. Among other objectives, Project Godwit has aimed to enhance wet grassland habitat, reduce the impacts of ground predation and begin a rear-and-release programme. 'Headstarting' – which involves collecting eggs, rearing the chicks in captivity and releasing at the fledging stage – has so far produced 155 released birds. Results are still at the early stages, though the Ouse breeding population is increasing while the species remains stable at the Nene Washes.

JON HEATH

One of the conservation successes of the past decade has been the establishment of a healthy population of Common Crane in The Fens. This special bird is now a familiar year-round sight.

JON HEATH

Other rare and interesting wildlife found widely in The Fens includes the declining Water Vole.

Fenland marshes make the perfect roost location for many species. Particularly in winter, a dusk stakeout by an extensive reedbed can be very rewarding. The main target species will likely be harriers, with Western Marsh Harrier sometimes arriving in double figures at favoured spots. Hen Harrier is the real prize: patience is needed, for 'ringtails' and ghostly grey males are often the last birds to appear, just as the light is fading.

But it's not all about birds of prey: roosts of passerines such as Pied Wagtail and Reed Bunting can be impressive, while big 'murmurations' of Common Starlings can also be enjoyed. At my local reedbed, a Corn Bunting roost sometimes numbers in the hundreds. They have their own preference for accumulating on telegraph wires when waiting to roost, occasionally performing a murmuration of their own if spooked by a Peregrine Falcon or Merlin. Dusk also brings the opportunity to see hunting owls. The Fens hold one of the highest UK densities of Barn Owls, while in certain years Short-eared Owls are found in large numbers at suitable sites.

Spring migration can be an exciting time. On a good day in late April or May there is potential for unusual waders such as Grey Plover, Bar-tailed Godwit and Spotted Redshank passing through, often in their stunning summer dress. Parties of Little Gull and Arctic and Black Terns may also briefly stop to feed up during their migration. It is also the best time to find a rarity – among others, Squacco Heron, Bonaparte's Gull and Great Reed Warbler have been found along my local Great Ouse Valley in recent years.

There is also plenty of other wildlife to see. The open fields with scattered marshes and woodlands make great

JOSH JONES

The Nene and Ouse Washes support thousands of Whooper and hundreds of Bewick's Swans in winter, turning fields white as they gather to feed. The soft calls of family parties are an iconic sound of The Fens during the colder months and build to a spectacular crescendo as big flocks form.

Where to visit

Here is a selection of some of the best reserves at which to experience the finest wildlife that The Fens has to offer.

- **Great Fen, Cambridgeshire:** a vast area of fenland including the reserves of Woodwalton Fen and Holme Fen.
- **Lakenheath Fen RSPB, Suffolk:** transformed carrot fields, now home to Eurasian Bitterns and Common Cranes. Can be a very good spot to watch Eurasian Hobbies.
- **Ouse Washes RSPB, Cambridgeshire:** numerous hides allow views over the vast floodplains. Excellent for wildfowl in winter.
- **Welney WWT, Norfolk:** a heated hide for swan feeds in winter; the adjacent Lady Fen is a good migrant wader spot.
- **Willow Tree Fen LWT, Lincolnshire:** a viewing area looks over the entire site and gives a great chance of seeing breeding Common Crane.
- **Wicken Fen, Cambridgeshire:** one of Britain's oldest nature reserves, with more than 9,000 species of wildlife recorded.

habitat for Roe Deer, with groups well into double figures seen during winter. The marshy habitats are also ideal for strange, tusked Chinese Water Deer. The Fens is the UK stronghold for this non-native species. Water Vole is fairly frequent in the many dykes and ditches, their presence given away by burrows in the banksides.

Similar to birds, much other wildlife has suffered catastrophic declines due to loss of former habitat. Iconic fenland species such as Swallowtail butterfly, Reed Leopard moth, Fen Raft Spider and Fen Orchid are now limited to just a handful of sites, though the situation may improve in the future with ongoing conservation work.

Fenland future

After much biodiversity loss in The Fens, the recovery of some species is a positive development with several ongoing projects to build on this success, including two key restoration plans in Cambridgeshire. The Great Fen Project aims to restore a huge area of fenland between Huntingdon and Peterborough, covering some 3,700 ha. The aim is to recreate an interconnected mosaic of wetland habitats, including open water, reedbeds and meadows, as well as linking the existing reserves of Holme Fen and Woodwalton Fen. Another project at Britain's oldest nature reserve – the Wicken Fen Vision – similarly aims to reconnect habitats, covering some 53 sq km in the south of the county.

Today's fenland landscape is dominated by humans, with much of the land used for agriculture and new developments. A growing human population and challenges arising from climate change mean that water resources are under great pressure. Indeed, many fenland streams and washes dried up completely during 2022's exceptional summer heat. A new 5-sq-km Fen Reservoir has been proposed near the Ouse Washes, intending to address rising water demands. Although primarily for human needs, it is hoped the reservoir will provide new wetland habitats, creating an interesting area to attract migrating birds.

Drainage and ongoing cultivation have reduced fenland peat levels so that many areas now lie below sea level and may once again be in danger of flooding, particularly if sea levels rise in line with climate change. Birdlife also seems to be affected by the changing climate. Recent years have seen Great and Western Cattle Egrets and Black-winged Stilt breed in The Fens, while some species, including Little Bittern, Glossy Ibis and Baillon's Crake, have shown signs that they may soon attempt to do so. In contrast, those birds preferring cooler conditions, such as Willow Warbler and Meadow Pipit, are shifting northwards and disappearing from many parts of the region.

Restoration and recovery of wetland habitats in The Fens is not only important for the protection of rare wildlife but it also brings the added benefits of carbon sequestration, flood regulation and water purification. For centuries, The Fens have been an important part of human history and culture, providing rich agricultural land albeit at the expense of our natural heritage. If fenland is to prosper for both humans and wildlife, a balance needs to be struck in what is a unique and valuable ecosystem. ■

Further information

- Fens for the Future: **www.fensforthefuture.org.uk**
- Wicken Fen Vision: **bit.ly/3MI9dA9**
- Project Godwit: **www.projectgodwit.org.uk**
- The Great Fen Project: **www.greatfen.org.uk**

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APO Televid 82 Angled

	RRP	ONLY
APO Televid 65 Angled Bundle	£2350	**See website**
APO Televid 65 Straight Bundle	£2350	**See website**
APO Televid 82 Angled Bundle with Leica Stay on Case	£3355	**See website**
ACCESSORIES		
1.8x Extender	RRP £325	£299
Stay on Case		£225

NIKON SPOTTING SCOPES

ED50
Nikon's smallest high-end scope with brilliant optics.

ANGLED OR STRAIGHT	RRP	NOW
50mm - Pearlescent Green	£439	**£399**
50mm - Charcoal Grey	£439	**£399**
20-45x Zoom Eyepiece	£369	**£229**
20-60x Zoom Eyepiece	£239	**£349**
Hand Holding Case	£70	**£59**

PROSTAFF 5
Compact design and reliable performance.

ANGLED OR STRAIGHT	NOW	NOW
82mm - Black c/w stay on case	£399	**£279**
60mm - Black c/w stay on case	£309	**£225**
16-48/20-60x Zoom Eyepiece	£149	**£119**

MONARCH ED
Bright ED optics with crisp clarity & rich contrast.

ANGLED OR STRAIGHT	RRP	NOW
82mm ED - Black	£1349	**£1049**
60mm ED - Black	£1179	**£799**
20-60x Zoom Eyepiece	£339	**£299**
30-60x W Zoom Eyepiece	£489	**£419**
Stay on Case	£119	**£99**

opticron FIELDSCOPE BUNDLES FOR 2023

MM4 60mm GA ED

Angled or Straight Spotting Scope Bundles	RRP	NOW
c/w HDF T 15-45x Eyepiece	£698	**£668**
c/w SDLv3 15-45x Eyepiece	£818	**£778**
Stay on Case	from	**£65**

MM4 77mm GA ED

Angled or Straight Spotting Scope Bundles	RRP	NOW
c/w HDF T 18-54x Eyepiece	£928	**£878**
c/w SDLv3 18-54x Eyepiece	£1048	**£985**
Stay on Case	from	**£65**

ES100 GA ED/45 V4
Angled Spotting Scope
with 27-80x SDL v3 Eyepiece
(Stay on Case from £89)
RRP £1544 **NOW £1399**

HAWKE
SPOTTING SCOPES

LIFETIME WARRANTY

Endurance - Angled
Provides the performance to get close to the action and the durability you demand.

	RRP	NOW
20-60x68 ED NEW	£749	**£699**
25-75x85 ED NEW	£849	**£799**

Endurance ED Compact - Angled
Ultra Compact And Lightweight Construction.

	RRP	NOW
13-39x50 ED NEW	£499	**£449**
13-45x60 ED NEW	£599	**£549**

Nature-Trek
Exceptional optical performance, light-weight & waterproof.

			RRP	NOW
9-27x56	NEW	Angled	£249	**£229**
13-39x56	NEW	Straight	£299	**£279**
16-48x65		Angled	£299	**£279**
20-60x80		Angled	£349	**£329**

Vantage - Angled
Vantage spotting scopes are supplied with everything you need to get started.

	RRP	NOW
20-60x60	£189	**£169**
24-72x70	£229	**£209**

CELESTRON — AMAZING OFFER

ULTIMA
100mm STRAIGHT 22-66x ZOOM

The largest aperture scope in the Ultima line, the 100mm Ultima offers more than 50% brighter images than the 80mm, allowing for better performance in low light conditions. The 100mm refractor features excellent multi-coated optics packed into a portable and durable refractor design and comes standard with a 22-66x zoom eyepiece.

RRP £429.99
NOW £179
UNDER 1/2 PRICE

SAVE £250
Includes Soft Carry Case ▸

CELESTRON

ULTIMA
65mm Angled 18-55x Zoom Spotting Scope with Smartphone Adapter

The most compact model in Celestron's Ultima series spotting scopes, the 65mm refractor features a 45° viewing angle and excellent mulit-coated optics packed into a portable and durable refractor design and it comes standard with an 18-55x zoom eyepiece. Capture images and video right on your smartphone with the included handy smartphone adapter.

RRP £249.99
NOW £99

Includes Soft Case ▴
SAVE OVER £150
Includes a Smartphone Adapter ▸

No1 SELLER
AWARD WINNING MODEL
HIGHLY RECOMMENDED
NEW

VORTEX

NO QUIBBLE LIFETIME GUARANTEE

NEW
TRIUMPH HD 10x42
£119 - See website
UNLIMITED LIFETIME WARRANTY

CROSSFIRE HD
More Colour. More Fidelity. Includes Glasspak binocular harness! No Quibble Lifetime Guarantee!

	RRP	NOW
8x42	£189	£169
10x42	£199	£179
10x50	£229	£205
12x50	£239	£215

DIAMONDBACK HD
Gives stunning views and impressive low-light performance

NEW HD MODELS

	RRP	NOW
8x28	£159	£145
10x28	£179	£159
8x32	£239	£215
10x32	£249	£229
8x42	£259	£235
10x42	£269	£245
10x50	£289	£259
12x50	£309	£279
15x56 NEW	£409	£369

VIPER HD
With HD (High Density) extra- low dispersion glass, one look is all you'll need to appreciate why the Viper HD is an award- winning bino - No Quibble Lifetime Guarantee

	RRP	NOW
8x42	£599	£539
10x42	£619	£559
10x50	£689	£619
12x50	£699	£629

RAZOR HD
Small, light, bright, and strong. These binoculars have a well-earned reputation for pushing the limits of optical performance

Superb

	RRP	NOW
8x42	£1049	£945
10x42	£1112	£999
10x50	£1135	£1025
12x50	£1169	£1055

RAZOR ULTRA HD
Close Focus is an amazing 3.3 feet! Comes complete with a Glasspack Case. No Quibble Lifetime Guarantee.

	RRP	NOW
8x42 NEW	£1699	£1529
10x42 NEW	£1729	£1559
10x50 NEW	£1759	£1589
12x50 NEW	£1799	£1619
18x56 NEW	£1999	£1499

SWAROVSKI OPTIK

NL PURE

"WOW!" was the only word I could utter when I took my first look through Swarovski's NL Pure 8x42 binocular.
Mike Alibone

ONE WITH THE MOMENT
The largest-ever field of view with almost indiscernible edges

ONE WITH YOU
Designed to fit perfectly into your hand.

FREE
Swarovski Bino Suspender Pro **worth £56**
with every NL Pure purchased this month

8x32	£2210
10x32	£2260
8x42	£2630
10x42	£2680
12x42	£2720
Forehead Rest	£108

EL BINOCULARS WITH FIELD PRO PACKAGE
c/w field bag pro, eyepiece & objective lens covers & lift carrying strap pro.

	RRP	NOW
8.5x42 W B	£1880	£1785
10x42 W B	£1900	£1805
10x50 W B	£2520	£2395
12x50 W B	£2550	£2425

SLC

	RRP	NOW
SLC 8x56	£2000	£1900
SLC 10x56	£2040	£1940
SLC 15x56	£2110	£2005

FREE
Swarovski Cleaning Set worth £54 with Swarovski Full Size Binos

CL COMPANION NOMAD
Stunning optics, outstanding ergonomics, & finest leather armoring

8x30	£2440
10x30	£2440

CL COMPANION ACCESSORY PACKS

Wild Nature

	RRP	NOW
8x30	£1110	£1055
10x30	£1140	£1085

Urban Jungle

	RRP	NOW
8x30	£1110	£1055
10x30	£1140	£1085

Northern Lights

	RRP	NOW
8x30	£1110	£1055
10x30	£1140	£1085

CL CURIO

7x21	£660

CL POCKET COMPACTS
Green or Anthracite

c/w Wild Nature Accessory Pack

8x25	£700
10x25	£740

c/w Mountain Accessory Pack

8x25	£700
10x25	£740

HAWKE

2023 BINOCULAR RANGE

NATURE TREK
Available in Green

	RRP	NOW
8x25	£109	£99
10x25	£119	£109
8x32	£169	£149
10x32	£179	£159
8x42	£189	£169
10x42	£199	£179
10x50	£209	£189
12x50	£219	£199

ENDURANCE ED
Available in Green or Grey

	RRP	NOW
8x25	£169	£149
10x25	£175	£159
8x32	£259	£239
10x32	£269	£249
8x42	£289	£269
10x42	£299	£279
10x50	£329	£309
12x50	£349	£329

FRONTIER HDX
Stunning HD viewing...
Available in Green or Grey

	RRP	NOW
8x32	£299	£279
10x32	£309	£289
8x42	£349	£329
10x42	£369	£349

FRONTIER EDX
Immerse youself... ...in superior vision
Available in Green or Grey

	RRP	NOW
8x32	£469	£419
10x32	£479	£429
8x42	£499	£449
10x42	£519	£469

VANTAGE

Green	RRP	NOW
8x32	£135	£125
10x32	£139	£129
8x42	£149	£139
10x42	£159	£129
10x50	£179	£169
12x50	£189	£179

FRONTIER APO
Stunning HD viewing. Focus from 2m!
Available in Green

	RRP	NOW
8x42	£729	£679
10x42	£749	£699

FRONTIER LRF
Laser rangefinding binoculars.
Available in Green

	RRP	NOW
8x42	£999	£949
10x42	£1099	£1049

PREMIER AUTHORISED DEALER

Leica

BINOCULARS & SPOTTING SCOPES

APO Televid Spotting Scopes
Detailed, high-contrast images.

• Angled or Straight	RRP	NOW
82 c/w 25-50x WW & SOC	£2980	See
65 c/w 25-50x WW	£2350	website
Leica 1.8x extender	£325	£299
Leica Stay on Case		£225

Noctivid
Bright and brilliant image - well into dusk!
• Black or Olive Green

	RRP	NOW
8x42	£2420	See
10x42	£2420	web

Ultravid HD Plus
High optical performance

	RRP	NOW
8x32	£1860	See website
10x32	£1860	
8x42	£2150	
10x42	£2150	

Geovid R
Laser rangefinding binoculars
from £See website

Trinovid HD
Rugged and compact!

	RRP	NOW
8x32	£910	See website
10x32	£910	
8x42	£1090	
10x42	£1090	

(CHECK OUR WEBSITE FOR LATEST PRICES)

Trinovid BCA Compacts
Exceptional & Rugged.

	RRP	NOW
8x20 BCA	£450	See
10x20BCA	£500	web

Ultravid BR Compacts
Handy and versatile

	RRP	NOW
8x20 BR	£700	See
10x25 BR	£730	web

CELESTRON BINOCULAR RANGE

NATURE DX
GREEN or BLACK (extra £20)

Includes Case	RRP	NOW
8x32	£129.99	£105
10x32	£129.99	£105
8x42	£159.99	£109
10x42	£159.99	£119
10x56	£219.99	£99
12x56	£219.99	£169

NATURE DX ED

Includes Case	RRP	NOW
8x42 DX ED	£219.99	£179
10x42 DX ED	£219.99	£179
10x50 DX ED	£269.99	£219
12x50 DX ED	£269.99	£219

TRAILSEEKER

Includes Case	RRP	NOW
8x32	£239.99	£99
10x32	£239.99	£99
8x42	£269.99	£189
10x42	£269.99	£189

TRAILSEEKER ED

Includes Case	RRP	NOW
8x32 ED	£299.99	£199.99
10x32 ED	£299.99	£199.99
8x42 ED	£369.99	£299.99
10x42 ED	£369.99	£299.99

Celestron's NEW Premium line. With both ED objective lenses & flat field lenses, these binoculars provide sharp, expansive views and of a high degree of accurate colour resolution.

REGAL ED - Flat Field

	RRP	NOW
8x42 ED	£399.99	£329
10x42 ED	£399.99	£329

Nikon

2023 BINOCULAR RANGE

PROSTAFF 3
Light and tough.

8x30	NEW	£139
10x30	NEW	£149
8x42	NEW	£169
10x42	NEW	£179

PROSTAFF P7
Compact and tough.

8x30	NEW	£189
10x30	NEW	£199
8x42	NEW	£219
10x42	NEW	£249

MONARCH M5
Compact and tough.

8x42	£279
10x42	£299
12x42	£329

MONARCH M7
Compact and tough.

8x30	NEW	£349
10x30	NEW	£379
8x42	NEW	£439
10x42	NEW	£449

MONARCH HG
Outstanding clarity & wide field of view. For birdwatching or tracking wild animals.

	RRP	NOW
8x30	£899	£799
10x30	£949	£829
8x42	£999	£849
10x42	£1049	£899

EDG DCF
Delivering a spectacular field of view. Lenses made with Nikon ED glass.

	RRP	NOW
7x42	£1999.99	£1499
8x42	£2199.00	£1599
10x42	£2299.00	£1699

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opticron
Sports & Nature Optics Since 1970

DISCOVERY WA ED
Ultra-compact. 8x32 £199

TRAVELLER BGA ED
Smaller, brighter, sharper

	RRP	NOW
8x32	£379	£349
8x42	£389	£359

NATURA BGA ED
Brighter, sharper images

	RRP	NOW
8x42	£379	£349
10x42	£389	£359

OREGON 4 PC OASIS
Nitrogen waterproof binoculars

8x32	£129	10x42	£149
8x42	£139	10x50	£159

AURORA BGA VHD
Smaller, Lighter, Brighter, Sharper.

8x42	£799
10x42	£809

IMAGIC IS
'Image Stabilising' Binoculars.

	RRP	NOW
10x30	£569	£539
12x30	£579	£549
14x30	£599	£569

DISCOVERY WP PC

8x32	£159	10x42	£179
7x42	£169	8x50	£199
8x42	£169	10x50	£199

DBA VHD+
Smaller, brighter, lighter, sharper

	RRP	NOW
8x42	£599	£499
10x42	£609	£499

EXPLORER WA ED-R
Compact binocular, wide field of view.

	RRP	NOW
8x32	£229	£209
8x42	£249	£229
10x42	£259	£239

VERANO BGA VHD
High levels of comfort and performance.

8x32	£399
8x42	£409
10x42	£419
10x50	£429

Bushnell BINOCULARS

PRIME
Bright images in any weather

	RRP	NOW
10x25	£104.99	£89.99
10x28	£159.99	£129.99
8x32	£149.99	£119.99
8x42	£169.99	£139.99
10x42	£179.99	£149.99
12x50	£209.99	£169.99

LEGEND
Outstanding resolution, contrast, & light transmission

	RRP	NOW
8x42	£209.99	£159.99
10x42	£229.99	£179.99
10x50	£289.99	£199.99
12x50	£319.99	£239.99

ENGAGE
Amazing colour, resolution & contrast, even in low-light

	RRP	NOW
10x42 DX	£289.99	£249.99
12x50 DX	£319.99	£279.99
8x42 EDX	£449.99	£349.99
10x42 EDX	£469.99	£389.99
10x50 EDX	£499.99	£399.99
12x50 EDX	£519.99	£399.99

FORGE
With low light performance that rivals even the most respected optics brands.

	RRP	NOW
10x30	£389.99	£299.99
8x42	£519.99	£399.99
10x42	£549.99	£449.99
15x56	£819.99	£699.99

Ideal Travel Tripod

SLIK BIRDWATCHING TRIPODS

PRO CF-633
Carbon Fibre Tripod Legs
Wt: 2.1lb • Max Load: 6.6lb
RRP £306 **£239**

PRO CF-733
Carbon Fibre Tripod Legs
Wt: 2.9lb • Max Load: 11lb
RRP £349 **£259**

PRO CF-833
Carbon Fibre Tripod Legs
Wt: 3.4lb • Max Load: 15.4lb
RRP £396 **£319**

PRO AL-323DX
With SH-705E Pan Head
Wt: 4.1lb • Max Load: 8.8lb
RRP £142 **£119**

SLIK ACCESSORIES

SH-707E - Multi-Action Head
with quick release plate
RRP £60 **£49**

SVH-501 - Compact Fluid Head
with Arca-type quick release
RRP £118 **£99**

SAVE UP TO £210
ED
RAINGUARD HD
WB
SAVE UP TO £180
RAINGUARD HD
WB

Bushnell LEGEND BINOCULARS **SPECIAL OFFER**

L SERIES 8x42 & 10x42
ED Prime glass • Waterproof/Fogproof • Soft touch grips

8x42.........RRP £395 **SOLD OUT**
10x42.........RRP £449 **NOW ONLY £239**

E SERIES 8x42
RainGuard HD • Fully Multi-Coated Optics • PC-3 Phase Coating

8x42.........RRP £299 **NOW ONLY £139**
10x42.........RRP £329 **NOW ONLY £149**

• Wt:1.5kg
• Wt:1.8

SWAROVSKI OPTIK

2022 TRIPOD SELECTION

UNIVERSAL TRIPOD ADAPTOR
Designed for the EL Range & SLC 42
RRP £106 **£99**

◂ CCT COMPACT CARBON TRIPOD
Easy-to-use CCT compact carbon tripod, perfectly equipped for hiking or traveling. It combines low weight and impressive stability - & when it's folded up it's even small enough to fit in your carry-on luggage.
RRP £747 **£679**

PCT PROFESSIONAL CARBON TRIPOD ▸
Rugged enough to withstand challenging conditions such as high winds. It offers the excellent stability that you need for extended periods of observation, and also for professional digiscoping with camera & spotting scope.
RRP £792 **£699**

CTH COMPACT TRIPOD HEAD
Specially developed for fast viewing and digiscoping. Arca-Swiss- compatible quick- release mechanism
RRP £401 **£359**

PTH PROFESSIONAL TRIPOD HEAD
Ideal for extensive observation. The integrated fluid bearing ensures smooth, even movements.
RRP £548 **£469**

Manfrotto TRIPOD KITS FOR BIRDWATCHING & VIDEOS

290 LIGHT
Aluminium Tripod c/w Befree Live Fluid Video Head (MVH400AH)
RRP £187.95 **£149**

290 XTRA
Aluminium Tripod c/w 128RC 2 Way Fluid Video Head
RRP £229.95 **£169**

BEEFREE LIVE TWIST
Aluminium Tripod c/w Befree Live Fluid Video Head (MVH400AH)& Tripod Bag
RRP £287.95 **£199**

BEEFREE LIVE TWIST
Carbon Fibre Tripod c/w Befree Live Fluid Video Head (MVH400AH) & Tripod Bag
RRP £446.95 **£299**

190X 3 SECTION
Aluminium Tripod c/w XPRO Fluid Video Head
RRP £374.95 **£269**

190X VIDEO
Aluminium Tripod c/w MVH500 Fluid Video Head Flat Base
RRP £469.95 **£349**

755CX3 SINGLE LEG
Carbon Fibre Tripod c/w MVH500 Fluid Video Head
RRP £1034.95 **£699**

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24 MP
30 MP
32 MP
30 MP

2023 TRAIL CAMERAS

Bushnell CORE TRAIL CAMERAS

Solar Panel
For Trail Cameras
RRP £149.99 **£129**

Core Trail Camera
No Glow - 24MP - Tan
RRP £219.95 **£159**

Core S-4K Trail Camera
No Glow - 30MP - Camo
RRP £239.99 **£199**

Core DS-4K Trail Camera
NO Glow - 32MP - Camo
RRP £269.99 **£239**

Core DS Trail Camera
No Glow - 30MP - Treebark
RRP £329.99 **£259**

NEW
NEW
NEW
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NEW
NEW
12 MP
20 MP
30 MP
10 MP
10 MP
12 MP

SPYPOINT SURVEILLANCE CAMERAS

Solar-Dark
Invisible (black) LED's
Camo
RRP £239.95 **£229.99**

Force-20
Super Low Glow LED's
Brown
RRP £139.95 **£119.99**

Force-Pro
4K Resolution Video
Camo
RRP £219.95 **£199.99**

Link-Micro-S
Cellular Trail Camera
Low Glow
RRP £299.95 **£279.99**

Link-Micro-LTE
Cellular Trail Camera
RRP £199.95 **£189.99**

Link-Micro-LTE-Twin
Cellular Trail Camera
RRP £299.95 **£279.99**

SPYPOINT ACCESSORIES Security Boxes..........£59.99 • Cable Lock - 6ft..........£23.99 • Mounting Arm..........£28.99

35mm
50mm
NEW
IP67
HD
Thermal
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HIKMICRO
See the World in a New Way

WE ARE PROUD TO BE A HIKMICRO AUTHORIZED DEALER

FALCON
Thermal Monoculars

As used by the BBC

Welcome to the Falcon series of advanced thermal monoculars - Boasting an industry leading SUB 20 NETD sensor paired to a high quality F1.0 lens the Falcon delivers the highest performance thermal sensor available on the commercial market. This translates into an exceptionally high quality image even in the harshest of weather conditions.

- Extremely high thermal sensitivity NETD<20mk
- Super large aperture • SIGHT app connection
- HD thermal sensor - up to 640x512 @12μm
- Image Pro, enhanced image optimization
- Up to 2600m detection range

	RRP	NOW
Falcon 35mm - 384x288	£1699	£1599
Falcon 50mm - 640x512	£2599	£2449

NEW
THERMAL TECHNOLOGY
XG35
XG35LRF
STREAM VISION 2
8 COLOUR PALETTES

PULSAR IMAGE QUALITY

AXION 2 XG35
Better quality, better price

- Pocked-sized and lightweight monocular
- Enhanced image processing algorithms
- High-quality rendering of both target objects and background
- Designed for constant and often hardcore use
- Reinforced magnesium alloy housing
- Up to 7 hours of continuous operation

The new Axion 2 XG35 and its LRF counterpart, the Axion 2 LRF XG35 have a lot more to offer than their XQ35 predecessors, including a bigger sensor, wider field of view, larger viewfinder, and greater detection range.

Axion 2 XG35 - 640x480	£2339.95
Axion 2 XG35 LRF - 640x480	£2629.95

E+OE Prices subject to change. Goods subject to availability

The vanishing forest

Deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon has accelerated in recent years, with the state of Rondônia on the frontline of forest loss. ***Matt Eade*** recently visited the region, finding it to be a case of now or never for seeing the region's Critically Endangered species – some of which are teetering on the verge of extinction.

Humans are encroaching into the Amazon right across Brazil. The situation is particularly bad in Rondônia, where once-unbroken forests are being punctuated with cattle ranches, agricultural crops and logging tracks. Ironically, these roads can be brilliant for birding.

It was approaching late morning. The humidity was high and bird activity low in such oppressive conditions, yet one of many hoped-for targets – Undulated Antshrike – quietly resonated its song around us in the dense tangles of terra-firme rainforest. Excitingly, we caught a glimpse of this large and impressively marked antshrike, but we couldn't escape the background noise – the sound of machinery flattening the very forest in which this bird, and many others, exist …

In 2022, after a lengthy delay following a cancelled trip, I finally embarked on a private birding tour to the scarcely birded state of Rondônia in western Brazil. Having been to South America on only three occasions, there was a long list of potential new and mouth-watering birds on offer, with many of those having become Critically Endangered, or worse still, verging right on the edge of extinction. With only a handful of known territories on the planet, it is fair to say that Rondônia Bushbird fitted the latter category and this near-mythical creature was the principal target during my 15-day tour. It proved to be an excellent expedition, and a whole suite of rare and endangered birds were found with the help of our local guide.

Recent years have seen Rondônia in the news for all the wrong reasons – chiefly deforestation. This has persisted since before the turn of this century, although the rate of primary forest being destroyed for cow pastures and cultivations has increased exponentially year on year. Between 2002 and 2021, Rondônia lost a staggering 3.55 million ha of natural forest – an average rate of 184,000 ha per year. In 2021 alone, this figure increased to 243,000 ha. If current rates continue – and there is little evidence from locals to suggest otherwise – natural forest within Rondônia could vanish by 2080. It only takes a quick look at online map resources to see the extent of the destruction there.

Fires are also a contributor to forest loss in the state, but having spoken with local environmentalists, the majority of so-called 'wildfires', especially those witnessed during the COVID-19 pandemic, are in fact man-made and used to accelerate the rate of clearance.

Tipping point

It felt to me as if Rondônia was at a point of no return and I was keen to see the state's special birds before they disappeared forever. Of course, for any birder or wildlife enthusiast, visiting such regions can be somewhat distressing, with sightings offering a timely reminder that each individual could soon be displaced from its territory as the trees are mercilessly hacked down. It's far from only the birds at risk, too, with habitat harbouring endangered primates and a whole host of other flora and fauna being demolished on a daily basis.

An early morning flight from São Paulo to Porto Velho immediately caused grave concern – there was no forest at all! The four-hour journey revealed my worst fears. Where primary rainforest once existed, only extensive cattle ranches now thrived. Of course, I was highly aware of the current situation, but setting eyes on such an appalling scene sent shivers down my spine. There was a moment of optimism when, 30 minutes out of Porto Velho, tracts of forest were sighted, only for us to then realise they were fragmented remnants – forest that supports minimal wildlife and has an ill-fated future.

South-west Amazonia has an incredibly high diversity of wildlife – especially birds, with the general area possessing more than 800 species, plenty of which are endemic or near-endemic

ALL PHOTOS BY MATT EADE

Collared Puffbird is a widespread and glamorous bird of lowland forests in the Tabajara region.

Fasciated Antshrike is another common bird in Amazonia, but getting a clear view is never easy.

to the region. It remains relatively unexplored, with a dozen new avian discoveries made here in 2013 alone and no doubt many more are yet to be chanced upon.

That said, birding is hard work and, ironically, only realistically achievable from logging trails, which were somewhat abundant. These tracks can reveal new territories of desirable species, which can be handy for visiting birders – but, ultimately, any forest with such routes has a limited life expectancy and feelings are at best mixed when birding here. Example sites entered into my notebook included 'Linha 36' ('line 36'), this being a classic way of numbering which fragment of forest was due to be flattened next. Another issue is the rate at which the forest is disappearing – known target bird locations are rarely still extant after a few years.

But it's not all doom and gloom, as the remaining forest holds a variety of stunning birds: Hairy-crested Antbird, Bonaparte's Parakeet, Campina Jay and Curl-crested Aracari to name just a few were within a half-hour drive from Porto Velho. To find such a profusion of life in the forests here holds onto what little hope there is, but it's excruciating to know just how abundant the wildlife would be if these forests were left to their own devices.

Incredible diversity

One of the most exciting regions visited was Tabajara, situated along the Rio Jiparaná in the south-east of the state. Here, extensive forest remains and the wildlife is superb. The journey from Porto Velho takes most of the day, though a few surprises came our way. A Dark-winged Trumpeter – a highly elusive, ground-dwelling forest species – was stood motionless on the side of the main road, a 'road' which cuts through an area of forest on one side, while cultivations dominate the other. This incredible moment was a highlight of the trip and no doubt wouldn't have been possible if this fragment had been an expanse of untouched forest. Feelings were mixed given this predicament, but there was joy for setting eyes on this most peculiar of Amazonian species.

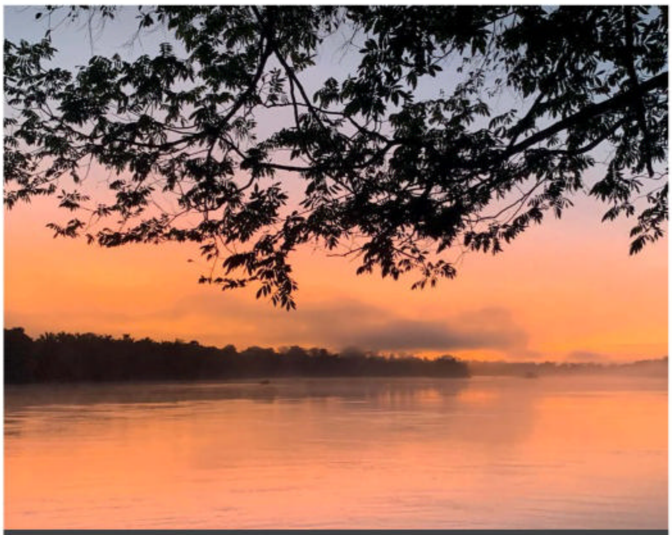
During the three days in Tabajara, many of our most-wanted birds gave themselves up, while the widespread Collared Puffbird was one of the most glamorous. Along sunlit logging trails, vast flocks of mixed species continuously flowed through the sub-canopy, only to be interrupted by squirrel monkeys, two species of marmosets, tamarins, and the most bizarre of all, a troop of Rio Tapajós Saki monkeys.

The region is 'antbird central', with no fewer than 20 species seen in these forests alone, including the highly secretive Pale-faced Bare-eye, White-breasted Antbird, Pearly Antshrike, Manicore Warbling Antbird and the canopy-hugging Sclater's Antwren – each as charismatic as the other.

Deep in the forest, fruit-sized missiles from above gave away the presence of the once-lost Kawall's Amazon. This parrot wasn't seen for more than 70 years until it was refound in a remote village in a local's pet cage!

Also near to Tabajara lies an expanse of Campina forest. This once-submerged habitat is relatively widespread throughout the Amazon and supports a distinct range of species, and is no doubt home to many that remain undiscovered. It was here that the poorly known Chico's Tyrannulet was discovered in 2009. Other excellent birds seen here were Pale-bellied Mourner, Natterer's Slaty Antshrike, Plush-crested Jay and Buff-cheeked Tody-Flycatcher, plus a gang of Crab-eating Foxes.

We also ventured north into the state of Amazonas, which offers some excellent birding in the várzea forest within easy reach of Porto Velho. These seasonal floodplain forests are some of the most productive areas in the Amazon and act as important breeding grounds



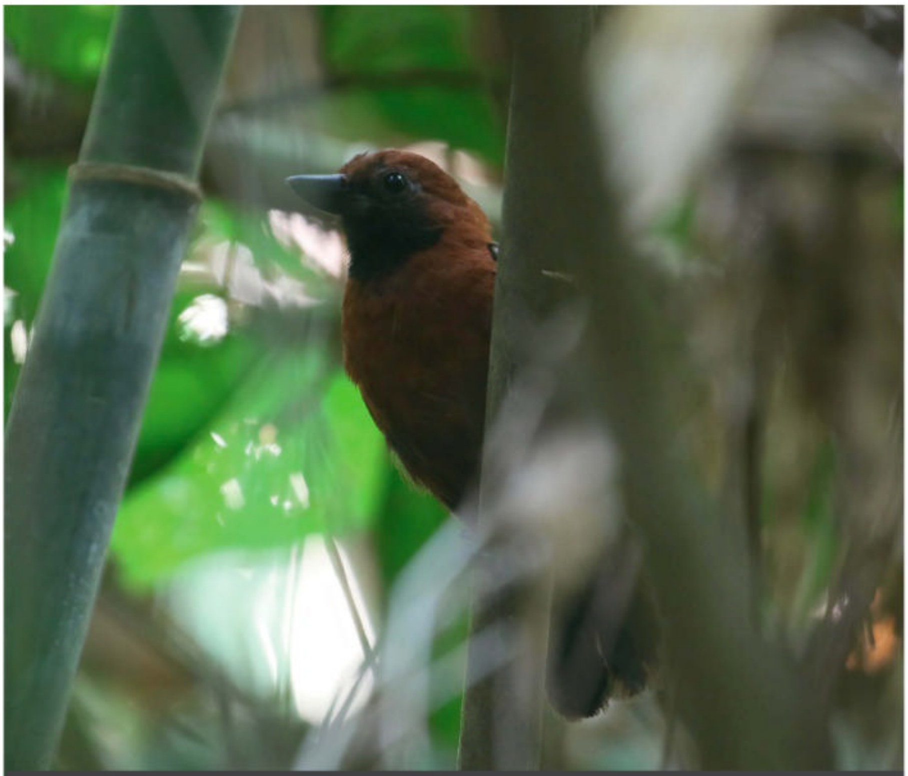
Extensive forest remains around the Rio Jiparaná at Tabajara, and the wildlife on offer here is superb.

This is the location where Matt saw the highly elusive Dark-winged Trumpeter. The forest on the right of the photo has been cleared.

for a host of wildlife.

Top-notch birding was enjoyed from start to finish during a morning here. A short ferry journey across the Rio Madeira produced Amazon River Dolphin and several Nacunda Nighthawks before we arrived in the forest itself. Among the myriad highlights were two of the Amazon's most-celebrated birds – Agami Heron and Hoatzin – plus Long-billed Woodcreeper and Amazonian Black Tyrant. Further evidence of a healthy forest came in the form of a band of South American Coatis and large troops of squirrel monkeys. A nearby open plain produced intimate views of what is usually renowned as one of South America's most elusive birds – the beautiful Ocellated Crake.

But it was in the south-west of Rondônia, close to the town of Jaci Paraná, where our quest for the Rondônia Bushbird began.



Rondônia Bushbird was the number one target for Matt on his Brazil trip. This bamboo specialist was downlisted from Critically Endangered to Vulnerable in 2008, but there are precious few known sites at which to see it and many of the previous hot-spots have now been deforested.

Bamboo specialist

Rondônia Bushbird is known from just a handful of localities in south-west Brazil. First discovered in 1986, the Jaci Paraná site has since been largely destroyed and from my time there in 2022, it is clear local birders are struggling to find new locations – only two are currently known in Rondônia, though one would expect (hope!) that this species exists in segments of forest many years away from human intervention.

The journey to the bushbird site, up a dusty road into open cultivations, was surrounded by cow pastures – long gone were the tall standing trees which once thrived here. Most trips have a make-or-break bird and Rondônia Bushbird was the star of this particular show, so the boat journey up the Rio Branco was incredibly tense, with this feeling being distracted momentarily when a gang of Hoatzins appeared in view.

The bushbird's habitat niche is bamboo forest, or stands of bamboo within terra firme forest. This habitat is rare and supports several scarcities, including White-cheeked Tody-Flycatcher and the striking Rufous-headed Woodpecker. In addition to forest clearance, 2022 produced extensive bamboo die-back, which can make finding these bamboo specialists even harder.

Once safely docked after a rocky journey across a tributary, we traipsed quietly through the seemingly untouched forest in which only a handful of bushbirds exist. Signs of these legendary birds were apparent on the bamboo stems, with slithers of bamboo 'skin' having been carved away to reveal insects for the birds to feed on. Despite staking out two bamboo stands with semi-recent sightings, it wasn't until four hours into the tense vigil that we suddenly heard our quarry – a gentle and inconspicuous whistle coming from deep within the bamboo. Mercifully, a dark ghost-like figure was located perching vertically

As its name suggests, the desirable Varzea Schiffornis is a bird of seasonally flooded riverine forests.

Having not been seen in the wild for 70 years and feared extinct, Kawall's Amazon was rediscovered in the 1980s.

A plethora of antbirds can be encountered in the lowland forests of Amazonia, including the attractive Spot-backed Antbird.

Capped Heron is one of the most beautiful members of its family, but is also among the least known.

about a metre off the ground – a male Rondônia Bushbird, showing off its hefty upturned bill. The bird's appearance initiated measured pandemonium from its onlookers – profuse sweating, intense shaking and high on emotional ecstasy, we had all seen the bird. Its motionless state was unlike that of a gingery female, which passed through the scene of celebration a few moments later, only to disappear almost instantly.

Rather in keeping with the story of this trip, we were deeply saddened to hear that this area was in the process of being cleared just weeks after our trip. Could it be now that just a single known territory of this epic bird exists?

Mixed emotions

With such an intense build-up to seeing Rondônia Bushbird, the remaining four days of our trip felt almost anticlimactic, even though it was jam-packed full of sumptuous birding. One day was spent on the Rio Madeira, where endemic-rich islands are reliable sites for the stunning Orinoco Goose, as well as Lesser Wagtail-Tyrant, Black-and-white Antbird, Parker's Spinetail, Little Ground Tyrant and Brownish Elaenia.

The other three days were spent further west in the state of Acre, which straddles the Bolivian border. A plethora of rare and staggeringly beautiful birds filtered their way onto our trip list, most notably Fulvous-chinned Nunlet, Chestnut-headed Crake, White-throated Jacamar, Rufous Twistwing and Goeldi's Antbird, as well as the bizarre-looking Ocellated Poorwill spotted during a night vigil.

On a personal level, being stung by a Bullet Ant was to be the standout memory from this stage of the trip – being temporarily disabled for four hours saw me dip out on Black-capped Tinamou, Amazonian Antpitta and White-throated Woodpecker, which only added to my pain – though proudly, despite my right hand being numb, my body sweating by the gallon and my mouth drooling, I managed to tick off Little Woodpecker and Bluish-slate Antshrike! Before having to lie down and miss an afternoon's birding, a tree rat species was located using a thermal camera and is, though not surprisingly, potentially a new species to science.

Despite a highly productive trip to Rondônia, I was left finding it difficult to see a future for many of the areas I had visited, as well as the entirety of the Brazilian Amazon. Reassuringly, the end of Jair Bolsonaro's presidency came at the end of 2022 and a Lula-led government gives a sense of hope – but has the country already gone too far in the wrong direction for a u-turn to be possible? Only time will tell, but if Brazil is on your list of countries to visit, go sooner rather than later while the wildlife hangs on in these devastated regions. ■

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Siège avec vue

Myriad birding destinations can be reached by public transport, but birds can also be seen from trains and buses. These Greater Flamingos were observed from a train window in southern France.

The slow birding movement

Birding can be a high-carbon hobby, especially if you're travelling abroad. But with a little planning, the trips you take can be environmentally friendly, as *Rebecca Armstrong* found when she spoke to *Jonnie Fisk*.

Birding has traditionally been a high-carbon activity, involving a lot of driving and – from the UK at least – long-haul flights to bird-rich destinations. But these days we're much more aware of the need to cut our carbon emissions.

On the other hand, ecotourism can deliver huge benefits to local communities, while we all have an understandable desire to experience other cultures and wildlife that we'll never see in our own countries. So how do we balance these sometimes-opposing demands?

I believe we can still bird abroad and be ethical. It isn't necessarily easy and it takes a bit of forward planning, but it's worth the effort.

What is ethical travel?

For those of us lucky enough to do it, travel is a privilege, and as such it comes with responsibility. Ethical travel means treating your destination and the people who live there with respect. As tourists we have the power and the freedom to choose how and where we spend our cash. We should aim to leave the places we visit better – even if only a tiny bit.

Every time we travel, we make a huge number of choices: about how to get there and get around once we're there, where to stay or where to eat. How we act when at our destination also makes a difference – get to know the local area and the locals, experience the culture. Not only will this be better for the places you visit, it'll make your trip more rewarding for you too.

Getting there

We're all a lot more aware of how we get around these days, with surface and air travel one of the main contributors to climate change. But with some careful choices and forward planning, we can all reduce our travel carbon footprints.

A grassroots movement known as 'slow travel' is gaining popularity. Much like the slow food movement that started in Italy in 1989, the emphasis is on enjoying the journey – it's about making a genuine commitment to local communities and the environment.

I spoke to UK birder Jonnie Fisk about his overseas birding habits. Having done several train trips in Europe to go birding, he's something of an expert on the subject. I asked him what made him swap from plane to train: "I had frequented airports to take multiple annual birding trips abroad with friends for a good half decade, each one of them as fun and formative as you'd imagine experiencing new places with your mates to be.

"But as time went on, an increased social literacy about the state of the world and crushing environmental anxiety led me to reassess whether these birding holidays via plane were anything more than a high-carbon indulgence. I realised I wouldn't be comfortable with

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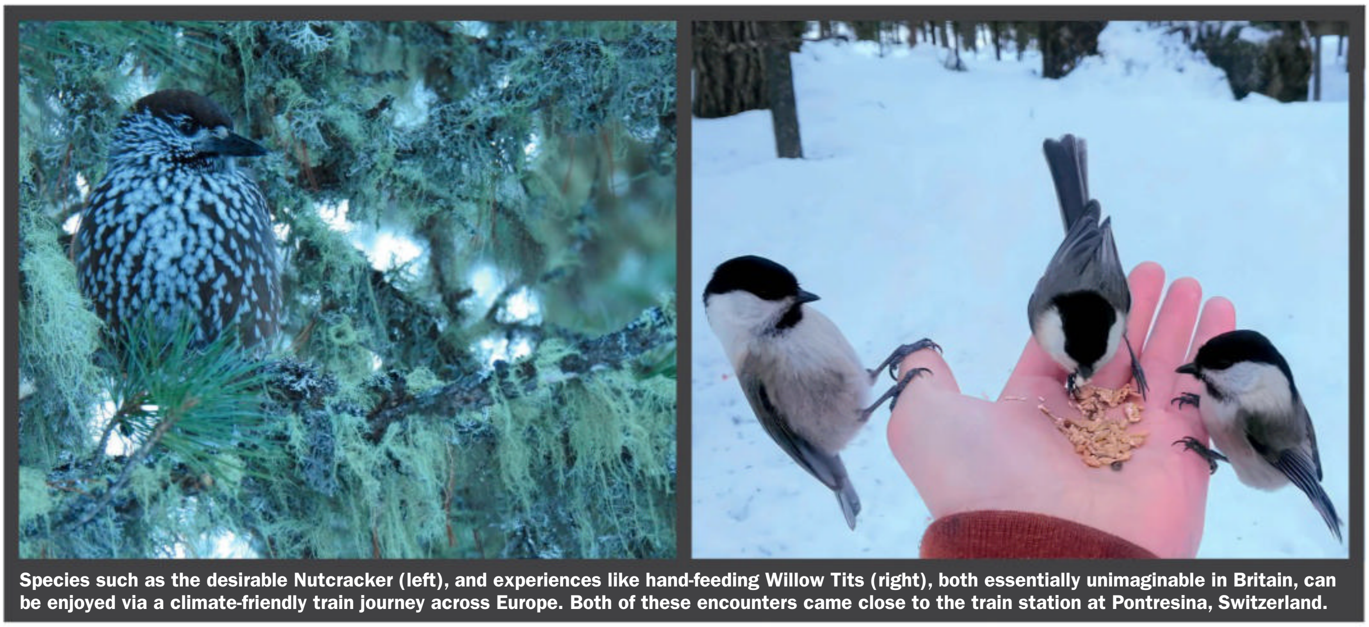

Species such as the desirable Nutcracker (left), and experiences like hand-feeding Willow Tits (right), both essentially unimaginable in Britain, can be enjoyed via a climate-friendly train journey across Europe. Both of these encounters came close to the train station at Pontresina, Switzerland.

myself if I continued. I still felt travel to be an important part of the human experience, I just knew that if I did it going forward, it would be without the assistance of an aeroplane."

With 240,000 km of railway track, much of mainland Europe is accessible by train and there are some fantastic high-speed, long-distance services linking every corner of the Continent. Taking the train instead of flying makes the journey part of your trip; the birding starts as soon as you leave the station.

"I've been lucky enough to see Red-footed Falcons, European Rollers and Lesser Grey Shrikes from rolling carriages; watched my best mate see his first Eastern Imperial Eagles from our sleeper train; and yelped to my fellow, fairly disinterested passengers that Greater Flamingos and Glossy Ibises were feeding alongside the tracks as we sped parallel to the Med."

It's not just Europe that's accessible by train. Turkey, Morocco, several countries in the Middle East and even Asia are all possible. This will add several days to your trip – something that those of us with limited precious days off work will have to take into consideration. "Accept the fact that this is 'slow' travel," says Jonnie. "Your trip will be bookended by at least a day each way to get there and back."

His advice? "Enjoy the process, take pleasure in the excitement of planning and the simple thrill that you may have to get creative with your routes." His top tips are to use the Man in Seat 61 website (**www.seat61.com**) and invest in a Eurail pass (**www.eurail.com**).

Some destinations simply aren't accessible by anything other than plane, and it's a personal decision as to whether you should still go. Once you've arrived, there are other things you can do to keep your birding 'green'.

A greater appreciation for where you're travelling to and the landscapes it supports can be had while travelling slow. Here, Jonnie Fisk soaks in the Alpine scenery in Switzerland.

Getting around

Birding breaks often involve a lot of driving to various hot-spots. But there are ways to cut this down.

Many of the best sites aren't necessarily close to train stations, but there may well be a bus to take you to your destination or your hotel might provide a minibus – it's always worth asking the question when you're booking. Failing that, hiring a car to get you from station to accommodation is still much less carbon intensive than flying.

Do a bit of research into your accommodation. Is it possible to find somewhere that's within walking or cycling distance of your main target sites? When booking, ask if there's anywhere you can hire a bike. The more people that ask these questions, the more likely hotels and so on will be to offer services like cycle hire or minibus transfers from local bus and train stations. If you don't ask, they'll never know such services are wanted, and you'll never know whether they're available.

There will always be locations that require driving. Instead of hiring your own car and driving yourself, go with a local guide in a group, cutting down on individual carbon emissions. Employing a local guide means you'll benefit from expert knowledge on where to find your target species, and you'll be supporting the local economy.

Going local

Tourism is big business, and we're often told that ecotourism brings a whole host of benefits. I believe that as birders we

ALL PHOTOS BY JONNIE FISK

A stop in Vienna, Austria, brought great views of male Red-backed Shrike (left), while the main target – the Critically Endangered European Hamster (right) – proved to be an easy 'train twitch' at the city's Central Cemetery, which is the easiest site in Europe at which to see the mammal.

want to help look after the places we visit. It's good for the wildlife that we're there to see – and want to continue to be able to see – and it's good for the location and the people who call it home. But this is only the case if we spend our hard-earned cash responsibly.

Birders already tend to go off the beaten track, and visiting less touristy destinations means you're supporting smaller economies. These areas don't always directly benefit from tourist cash, and your investment will help create jobs and business opportunities, balancing tourism inequalities.

Once there, use locally owned businesses – all those ecotourism pounds don't help the local economy if they flow out of the country and into the coffers of international companies. This means choosing accommodation and restaurants that are locally owned. It means employing local guides and buying locally produced goods and gifts.

Jonnie Fisk again: "During the city stop-overs necessary while travelling the rails long distance I prefer smaller, cheaper hostels to crash in, which are usually run by locals or independent youth groups. Local sandwich or pastry shops are a big vice of mine, too."

Supporting locally owned businesses over chains brings enormous economic, environmental and social benefits. Research in the UK has shown that for every £10 spent in an independently owned business, £25 is generated for the local economy, compared to £14 for every £10 spent in multinationals. Similarly, a US study found that for every dollar spent at a locally owned establishment, almost 45% of that revenue stayed in the local community; this is compared to just 14% for every dollar spent at a chain store.

Local businesses are more likely to support other local establishments and to employ local people. This helps to create a more stable economic and employment environment. It's also likely to cut carbon emissions, with produce sourced closer to home and workers travelling shorter distances.

You'll benefit too – by getting all the best tips from the people who best know the area. A guide who's lived there for years will know all the hidden hot-spots for your target species, while the owner of the local greengrocer will be able to advise on a great place for dinner.

Cultural exchange

Something else that will make your birding trip more enjoyable and rewarding is experiencing the culture. Your local guide will be able to advise on this too. The simple fact is that people like it when others show an interest in their lives, and asking questions about practices, events and locations of cultural and historical importance will deepen your understanding of the regions you visit.

Paying for entry to local heritage sites as well as nature reserves and national parks helps to provide vital funds to conserve these priceless places, saving them for wildlife and future generations.

Intercultural exchange is often touted as a benefit of tourism, as well as a justification for long-distance travel in these carbon-conscious times, but that's only the case if done properly. 'Brits abroad' have an unfortunate reputation, but as responsible travellers we can all help to disprove that stereotype.

Approach all interactions with a sense of respect for your hosts and their beliefs, and try to learn some of the language. No one expects you to be fluent, but a grasp of the basics will be much appreciated.

It's a good idea to read up on any local issues and plan accordingly. You wouldn't head to a new birding destination without doing a bit of research into what birdlife you're likely to see, so apply the same strategy to the destination itself. Find out as much as you can about where you're going to be staying.

For example, Airbnb rentals are increasingly being called into question, driving up house prices and pushing locals out of desirable areas. Some places have even banned them, so it's worth doing a bit of research before booking with one. All-inclusive packages to exotic locations rarely benefit local communities – such businesses are often foreign owned and, with food and drink prepaid, you're unlikely to buy from locals.

Travelling ethically takes a bit more planning than your usual holiday, but it's certainly possible. And it'll make your trip much more rewarding – for you, the wildlife and the local community. Here's to the slow birding movement! ■

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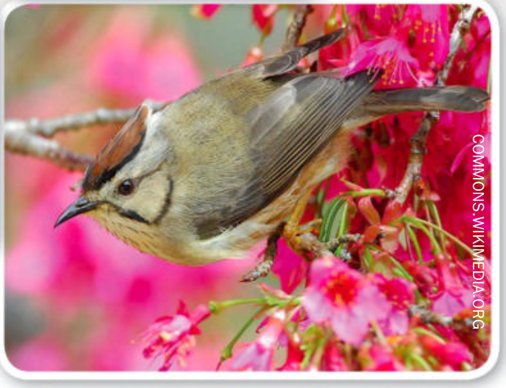

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VARIATIONS in geology, weather and elevation have blessed Taiwan with an extraordinary abundance of fora and fauna, including many endemic species that are found nowhere else. There are **32 species** of endemic birds, including the spectacular **Taiwan Blue Magpie, Mikado Pheasant, Collared Bush Robin, Taiwan Yuhina** and **Steere’s Liocichla.** Taiwan also plays winter host to around half the world population of the globally threatened **Black-faced Spoonbill.**

A modern infrastructure, superb cuisine, friendly people and a rich cultural heritage make Taiwan a wonderful place to visit.

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Taiwan

Taiwan is a hot-spot for endemism, with up to 32 unique bird species including Yellow Tit (main photo) and Taiwan Barwing (inset).

ROBERT TDC (COMMONS.WIKIMEDIA.ORG)

CHARLES LAM (COMMONS.WIKIMEDIA.ORG)

HOT-SPOT Rich in endemic birds, spectacular scenery and cultural heritage, the island of Taiwan has a unique appeal for visiting birders.

There is no place quite like Taiwan. Lying just over 150 km off the coast of south-east China, where the Palearctic and Oriental regions meet, the island is isolated enough to have developed an avifauna truly of its own. Smaller in area than Switzerland, it boasts vast tracts of undisturbed and bird-rich habitats with a unique range of species, making it an essential destination for the discerning world birder.

Habitats and climate

Two-thirds of Taiwan is rugged, mountainous terrain, running in five ranges from north to south, and forest cover remains extensive at about 60%. In contrast, the western third of the island is distinctly flatter, mainly agricultural and home to most of the human population.

The varied topography impacts on the climate, which ranges broadly from subtropical in the south to tropical in the centre and north, and temperate in the mountains. A rainy season in May and June is followed by a hot, humid summer with the chance of typhoons, then a long winter period from November through to March, when there is rain in the north-east but much of the island is sunny – making this the ideal time for a birding trip.

Birds

Taiwan has a very rich avifauna, some 686 species having been recorded in total. Of these, up to 32 are endemic to the island, making it, for its size, one of the most important centres of avian endemism in Asia.

Every birder should familiarise themselves with the endemic species, almost all of which can be seen during a visit of 10 days to two weeks. They range from the spectacular and gaudy to the subtle and cryptic and include: Taiwan Partridge, Taiwan Bamboo Partridge, Swinhoe's Pheasant, Mikado Pheasant, Taiwan Barbet, Taiwan Blue Magpie, Chestnut-bellied Tit, Yellow Tit, Styan's Bulbul, Taiwan Cupwing, Taiwan Bush Warbler, Black-necklaced Scimitar Babbler, Taiwan Scimitar Babbler, Grey-cheeked Fulvetta, Taiwan Hwamei, Rufous-crowned Laughingthrush, Rusty Laughingthrush, White-whiskered Laughingthrush, Steere's Liocichla, Taiwan Barwing, White-eared Sibia, Taiwan Fulvetta, Taiwan Yuhina, Flamecrest, Collared Bush Robin, Taiwan Whistling Thrush and Taiwan Rosefinch. There are also dozens of endemic subspecies with potential to be given species status in the future.

While the endemics are a top priority for many visiting birders, there is much more to see in the 'beautiful island'. In particular, it is home to two species considered at significant risk of extinction by conservationists: Taiwan has the world's most important wintering population of Black-faced Spoonbill, and is also home to Chinese Crested Tern, a species thought to be possibly extinct until a tiny breeding population was discovered on Taiwan-administered islands off China in 2000. Among many other specialities and sought-after birds (some of them seasonal) are Malayan Night Heron, Chinese Egret, Saunders's Gull, White-bellied Green Pigeon, Fairy Pitta, Island Thrush and Golden Parrotbill.

Top locations

Taipei area Taiwan's capital city has plenty of good birding sites, including the Taipei Botanic Gardens where Malayan Night Heron is possible, Taipei City Waterbird Refuge for numerous wildfowl, herons and other species, including the chance of Baikal Teal and Chinese Egret, and within easy reach nearby, Tangmingshan National Park, where the endemic Taiwan Blue Magpie and Taiwan Whistling Thrush are among the exciting possibilities.

Hohuanshan High in the mountainous centre of Taiwan, this productive area has White-whiskered Laughingthrush, Taiwan Bush Warbler, Flamecrest and Taiwan Rosefinch, alongside other desirable species such as Yellow-bellied Bush Warbler and Golden Parrotbill.

Tseng Wen Chi Located in Tainan county in the south-west, this estuary is best for the wintering flock of Black-faced Spoonbills, though the species has also been recorded at the Tatu Estuary.

Wushe Like Hsitou to the south, this town is close to some of the best forest birding in the north-central mountains, where all but two of Taiwan's endemic birds (Taiwan Blue Magpie and Styan's Bulbul) occur. Particularly worth searching out here are Swinhoe's and Mikado Pheasants, Taiwan Partridge, Steere's Liocichla, Taiwan Barwing, White-eared Sibia, Taiwan Yuhina and Yellow Tit. ■

TAIWAN

Getting there

- There are frequent flights from London and other European airports to Taipei.
- Taiwan has a good public transport network, but a hire car is most practical for birding.

Contacts

- Taiwan Tourism Bureau: **www.taiwan.net.tw**.

Further reading and resources

- *Guide to the Birds of China* by John Mackinnon and Karen Phillipps (Oxford University Press, £74.99) – order from **£68.99** from the BirdGuides Bookshop (**bit.ly/3WAbQ60**).
- Oriental Bird Club: **www.orientalbirdclub.org/taiwan**.

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Pocket rocket

Canon's new monocular is designed to help people explore nature in a new and dynamic fashion. But how does it perform? ***Kit Day*** takes a closer look.

REVIEW

Canon Powershot ZOOM

AT only 145 g and 10 cm in length, the Canon Powershot ZOOM is a truly pocket-sized telephoto zoom digital monocular, as well as a still and video camera.

You can use it to watch wildlife as well as take photos and video of what you see, and it's hard to imagine a smaller, lighter and simpler-to-use tool that performs these functions.

As a digital monocular the Powershot ZOOM works quite nicely. The 2.36-megapixel electronic viewfinder (EVF) is bright, sharp, and steady thanks to image stabilisation, though suffers from noise in poor light. Unsurprisingly, the quality and comfort of the view can't compete with an optical monocular or pair of compact binoculars. Focusing is only automatic, with a choice of single point or subject-detect AF. This worked fairly well for me but did struggle with more cluttered scenes. Tracking a Lesser Black-backed Gull in flight against the sky with the subject-detect worked well.

Pressing the 'zoom' button cycles through the three available focal-length increments; 100-mm or 400-mm equivalents and an 800-mm equivalent, 2x digital zoom. Close focus varies from 1 m at 100 mm to 4.5 m at 400 mm, so small subjects won't be frame-filling. At any stage you can push the 'photo' button to take a 12-megapixel JPEG (either single shot or 10-fps bursts), or the record button to shoot full HD video at 30 fps. ISO, aperture and exposure are all determined automatically. You can adjust exposure compensation to tweak the brightness of the image, but this involves going into the menu. There is no additional screen, so reviewing images and changing settings is all done through the EVF. An additional button or two (for example a dedicated playback button) would have been welcome to avoid quite so much cycling through menu options.

At 0.8 cm, the sensor is smaller than those in most smartphones and image quality suffers, but the 400-mm equivalent optical zoom makes this device better than a phone for bird photos. In good light (low ISO), shots of close subjects are OK, but more distant shots and those taken in lower light lack detail.

The ZOOM is compatible with the Canon Camera Connect app, which allows you to share the live view through the monocular with a smartphone and geo-tag images – a nifty feature.

Battery life is rated at 150 shots (though you should be able to get plenty more than this if shooting at 10 fps and turning the device off when not in use), or 70 minutes of viewing time. Charging is through a USB-C cable, so you can top it up from a portable power bank to as you go.

I found the Powershot Zoom fun and very easy to use. The image quality is the main drawback, but if you're after a single gadget with which you can watch wildlife and take record shots and video, all while not really noticing that you're carrying it, this would do the job nicely. The all-in-one functionality, light weight, fun design, smartphone connection and ease of use might make this a good product for a younger person, or for someone starting to take an interest in wildlife. ■

Further info

- **Price:** £289
- **Length:** 33.4 mm x 50.8 mm x 103.2 mm
- **Weight:** 145 g
- **Sensor:** 12 megapixels
- **Video:** full HD
- **Connectivity:** Wi-Fi and Bluetooth

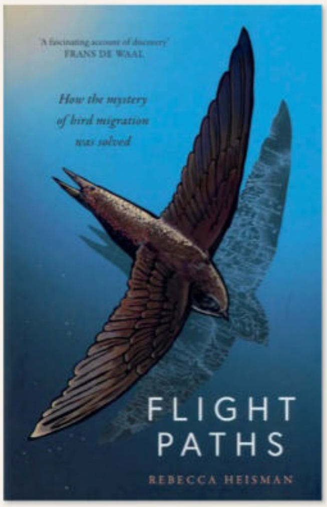
Verdict

✓ Great for engaging people with wildlife
✓ Lightweight and portable
✗ Image quality could be better

Understanding flight

***FLIGHT** Paths* offers a breathtaking journey through the world of avian migration studies. Authored by Rebecca Heisman, a zoology graduate with career experience in the American Ornithological Society, the book provides a fascinating look at how a disparate group of scientists, enthusiasts, birders and naturalists sought to understand the mechanics of avian long-haul flight. Focus is placed on the last century or so, though earlier enquiries from Native American oral traditions, the writings of Aristotle and the musings of 17th-century British physicist Charles Morton (who theorised that birds must fly to the Moon when they migrated) get a brief mention at the outset. As Heisman points out, this study is not so much about the birds and more about the various humans who conspired over time to better understand long-distance migration.

We journey first through the world of bird ringing, learning that only a tiny percentage of 'banded' birds are ever captured twice. We learn of the artistic licence of John James Audubon, an early pioneer of the practice, of the dedication of American ornithologist Leon J Cole, the migratory habits of House Finches introduced to the eastern USA from the 1940s, and the scientific work of the Bird Banding Lab and its explorations of avian flight, climate change and adaptation. From here, focus turns to the skies and studies of nocturnal flight patterns including the mammoth 'Bitterroot Array' (2018-19) that encompassed 52 recording sites in Montana. Chapter three leaps into the WW2 context of radar and the important studies of British researcher David Lack into the traces left by gannets on radar equipment, before a sonic illumination from early blips to digital tracking and geolocation, ending on a glimpse at Birdcast and its campaigns for light pollution reduction in city skyscrapers. Next, we take in the realms of radio telemetry and satellite technology, including the astonishing 'E7', a godwit tracked in real time across the Pacific from New Zealand to Alaska in 2007, before surveying the capacity of isotope technology to pinpoint migratory movements by analysing feathers. The final two chapters turn to other kinds of inventories, in the form of the feather library and citizen science backyard recording-counting-logging initiatives.


'A fascinating account of discovery'
FRANS DE WAAL
How the mystery of bird migration was solved
FLIGHT PATHS
REBECCA HEISMAN

Flight Paths is a lively, insightful and entertaining read which vividly brings out the personalities and the technologies invested in tracking avian movements, running alongside which is an autobiographical track that lightly reflects on the author's personal story, through career experience, cancer and COVID-19. Described on the back cover as an 'ornithological arms race', the book nimbly takes in a diversity of complex technologies to communicate the myriad ways we as a species have tried to acquire knowledge on our feathered friends. The reach is impressive without being overly scientific and Heisman writes with an animated style that brings her subjects to life in all their passions and eccentricities. The focus, while worldwide, is predominantly placed on the American context. This is a valuable history in itself, of course, but also one that left me wanting to know more about the British 'leg' of this story, the Cold War contexts of migrations across geopolitical divides and how this world of knowledge-making translated into international protection measures. All told, this is an engaging story about how a group of inspired amateurs and professionals from various fields became invested in understanding avian movements and of the scientific devices they deployed to answer the mystery of bird migration. An end section entitled 'sky full of hope' delivers an important parting message on the joys of watching and tracking avian migrants, not only to learn about movements and distances, but also to build a picture of population numbers and threats to survival. As Heisman puts it, 'to save them, we need to know them.' ***Karen Jones***

More info

- *Flight Paths: How the Mystery of Bird Migration Was Solved* by Rebecca Heisman.
- Swift Press, 2023. 264 pages.
- ISBN: 9781800752931. Hbk, £16.99.

In the Welsh uplands

A long-time resident in the Welsh hills, with Welsh-speaking children, David Elias is still only too well aware that he is a newcomer to the ancient farming communities of Snowdonia and the Berwyn Mountains, where he was for many years employed as a conservationist. Now, in a beautifully evocative book, he examines the progress of a Welsh Government scheme to promote environmentally sensitive farming. He brings a deep understanding of what ideally needs to be done for nature conservation, tempered by a close relationship with one hill farmer and the struggles to make ends meet in such a tough environment.

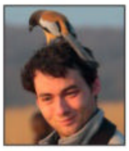
There are so many potential conflicts and compromises on both sides: predator control, grouse shooting, overgrazing, undergrazing … There is so much recorded loss of wildlife, chiefly concerning birds, but what does that mean for so many other forms of life that go under the radar? How much have we really lost? And how much can government policies begin to put things right? ***Rob Hume***

More info

- *Shaping the Wild: Lessons from a Welsh Hill Farm* by David Elias.
- Calon Publishing, 2023. 232 pages.
- ISBN: 9781915279347. Hbk, £18.99.

THIS MONTH'S EXPERT PANEL INCLUDES:

REBECCA ARMSTRONG has a wide-ranging interest in all wildlife. She worked for *Birdwatch* for 14 years.



KIT DAY is a Suffolk-based birder who has been photographing wildlife at home and abroad for more than two decades.

JOSH JONES is Editor of *Birdwatch*. He has been an ardent birder since a young age, with a particular fondness for waders and gulls.

KAREN JONES is a Professor of History at the University of Kent, with an interest in animal studies and the environment.

Walking in comfort

WAY back one spring in the late 1980s, I was part of a carload of London birders eager to bag some ticks in Scotland's Cairngorms NP. Following an overnight drive, we donned the obligatory Barbour jackets and set off up to the high tops. Fanning out along the side of one of the ridges, a couple of us encountered a man who was dressed like mountaineer Sir Chris Bonington and who looked as though he was about to star in a Bovril advert. We enquired as to whether he had seen any Ptarmigan or Eurasian Dotterel. He countered with a look of incredulity and questioned my mate, Paul, as to whether he had just traversed a wide section of compacted snow "in those" as he extended a gloved hand and pointed to a pair of brown suede brogues.

These days, Paul generally goes birding in more substantial footwear and I have progressed from the Dr Martens boots that I was sporting. Indeed, I recently acquired a pair of Blueridge ES hiking boots from Hanwag and have been putting them through their paces. Billed as being relatively light, waterproof and designed for trekking, these boots were an instantly comfortable fit and have performed very well on a range of different terrains. Mid-cut for ankle support and with a midsole supporting system, my feet have been cushioned and kept dry through many rugged hours in the field.

The rubber compound sole has a 4 mm tread depth and this has coped with wet and slippery conditions very well. The upper fabric of leather and robust polyamide has been easy to keep clean and has a feeling of durability. A standard range of sizes and colours are available and they are exactly the sort of footwear I would choose if I was contemplating the hike up Cairngorm today.

Made in Europe and using components entirely sourced in Europe, the production process is 100% PFC-free. ***Dexter Gordon***

More info

- Hanwag Blueridge ES Boot
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- **More info:** www.hanwag.com

The dangers of driving

ONE of the few good things to come out of lockdown was sitting in my London garden first thing in the morning, with a cup of tea and just listening. The lack of traffic meant I could hear birds singing; I could even smell my neighbour's honeysuckle.

Many people commented on how much nicer life was without the ever-present hum of cars. But once the regulations were lifted things just seemed to reset, and all that traffic is back on the roads.

One outcome of that unplanned experiment in road traffic reduction was a huge reset in animal behaviour. Birds sang more prominently, roadkill was dramatically reduced and species that generally avoid roads were found in close proximity to them.

The relatively new science of road ecology analyses the effects that roads and motor vehicles have on our wildlife. This new book from environmental scientist Paul F Donald summarises the findings, and it doesn't look good. He terms this effect 'traffication' and concludes that it's at least as damaging to the environment as climate change, agricultural intensification and habitat loss.

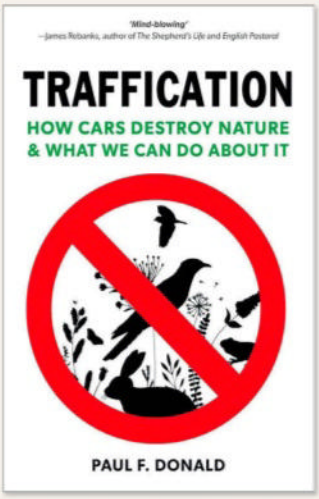
The book provides a fascinating, eye-opening and easy-to-read survey of the available research – much of it from The Netherlands, Germany and the US. UK-based studies are few and far between, and UK conservationists largely ignore the dangers of traffication. This is a problem because, according to Donald, the UK is one of the most heavily trafficated countries in Europe.

The dangers of traffication are many. Roadkill might be the most visible, but in many ways it's the least damaging. Air pollution, plastics and chemicals, the fragmentation of habitats and species populations, loss of diversity, noise and light pollution are all much more problematic. What's truly frightening – something that's beyond the scope of this book – is how these things are affecting humanity as well as wildlife.

The book also looks at some solutions to the damage that traffication is doing to our wildlife. Donald discusses mitigations that can be put in place, and in some cases already have been. He is, he says, hopeful.

If motor vehicles are so problematic, the solution is simple. It doesn't involve expensive reintroduction programmes or complicated research along thousands of kilometres of migration routes. It doesn't involve wholesale changes to agriculture.

It just means fewer cars on the roads. In fact, according to Donald, just reducing our speed will massively lessen many of the dangers of traffication. And that's something we can all get on board with. ***Rebecca Armstrong***


'Mind-blowing'
—James Rebanks, author of The Shepherd's Life and English Pastoral
TRAFFICATION
HOW CARS DESTROY NATURE & WHAT WE CAN DO ABOUT IT
PAUL F. DONALD

More info

- *Traffication: How Cars Destroy Nature and What We Can Do About It* by Paul F Donald.
- Pelagic Publishing, 2023. 288 pages; photos, graphs and illustrations.
- ISBN: 9781784274443. Hbk, £20.

Bookshop from £17

Island tribute

"WHAT a beautiful creation," was my immediate reaction upon opening a hefty parcel to reveal the three-volume *Fuglar Okkara*, or 'Our Birds' to give it its English translation, a wonderfully illustrated and detailed work dedicated to birds of the Faroe Islands.

The imagery throughout the book is exceptional – not least the staggering submerged Northern Gannet image which adorns the outer sleeve.

> "This tome has also been designed to a very high standard – quite frankly, I didn't really mind that I couldn't understand much of the book's writing, as it looked so great"

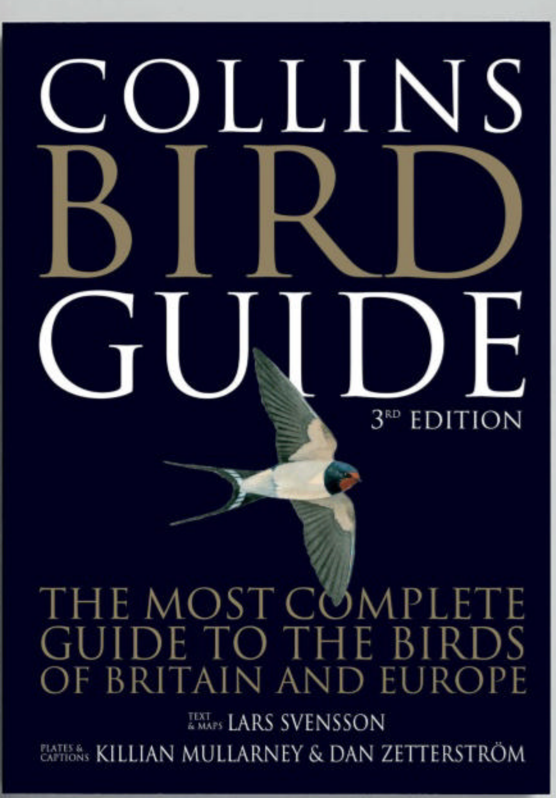
Although not all photos were taken in the Faroes, this didn't matter too much. This tome has also been designed to a very high standard – quite frankly, I didn't really mind that I couldn't understand much of the book's writing, as it looked so great – as vacuous as that might sound! The exact information attributed to each species depends on its Faroese status, with migrant or resident breeders naturally afforded more text (on the likes of range and population) than the vagrants. However, in the case of the latter, there are lists of past records and even distribution maps showing where these have turned up, so there is some interest and relevance for non-Faroese residents – particularly those interested in migration and vagrancy.

The main 'issue', if you can call it that, for non-Faroese speakers will be the hefty cost involved – it's a lot of money for a book you can generally only look at or flick through, rather than read. But this is a real showpiece item and looks absolutely fantastic – full credit to all involved, as it is clear that a vast amount of effort has been invested in its production!

Josh Jones

More info

- *Fuglar Okkara* by Silas Olofson and Jórun Pólsdóttir.
- Sprotin, 2022. 1,500 pages, colour photos.
- Three-volume hbk with protective cover, £105.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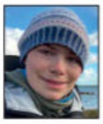
THIS MONTH'S PANEL



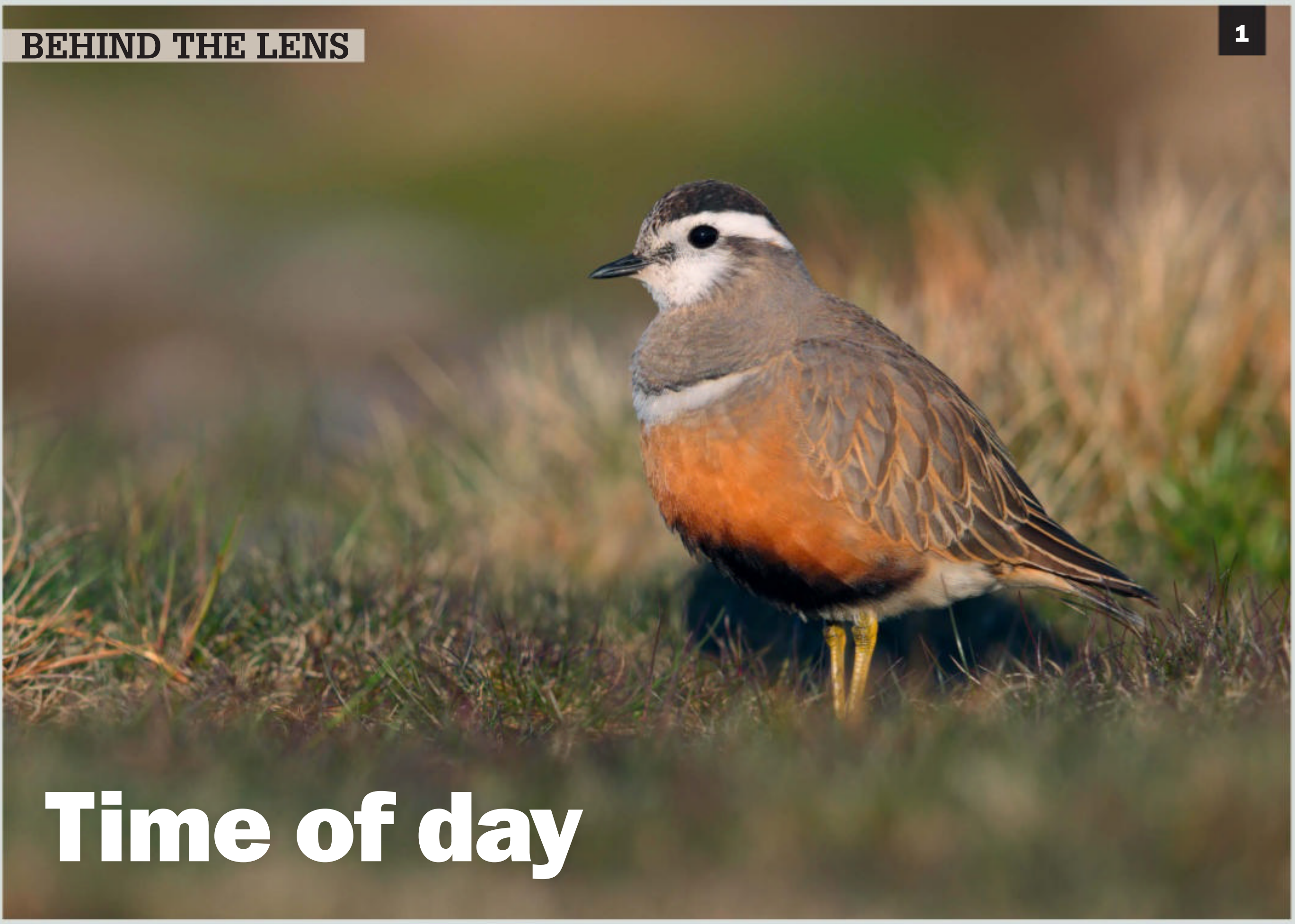
AMY ROBJOHNS is a patchbirder, ecologist and Assistant Recorder for the Hampshire Ornithological Society.

MATT PHELPS has spent the best part of 15 years working in various forms of land management, including as a head gardener.

KIT DAY is a Suffolk-based birder who has been photographing wildlife at home and abroad for more than two decades.

CHRIS HARBARD spent many years at the RSPB and is now a tour leader, writer and editor. He lives in Arizona, USA, and travels widely.

BEHIND THE LENS



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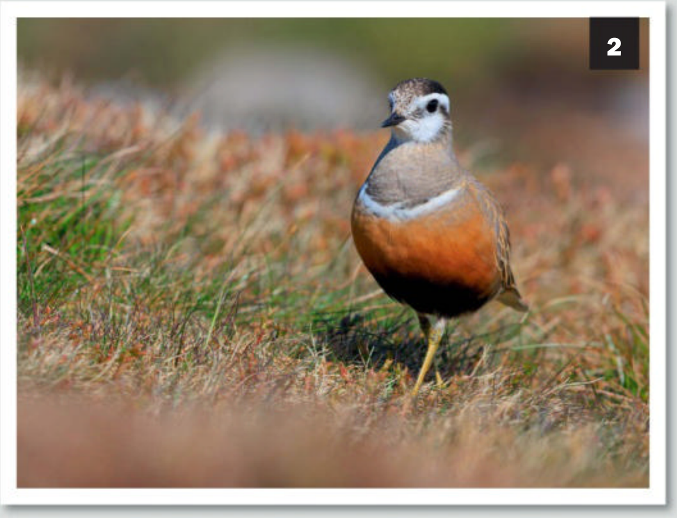
ALL PHOTOS: KIT DAY

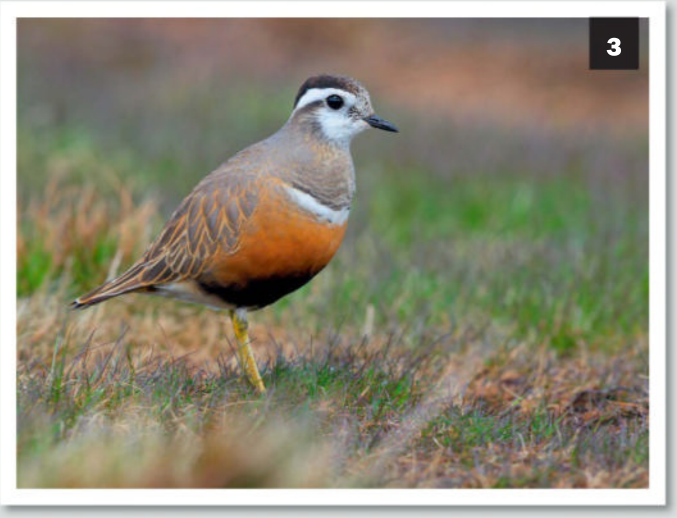
Time of day

AS eloquently discussed by Alan Tilmouth in last month's *Birdwatch,* the periods after sunrise and before sunset are particularly productive times to be in the field. Many birds are harder to find during the middle hours of the day, especially in spring and summer. This alone is enough to make the first and last few hours of daylight the prime times for photographing birds, especially in cloud-free conditions, but there are several other reasons why this is one of my number one tips for taking good bird photos.

First and foremost, there are the light conditions. When the sun is out, the golden light of early morning and late evening can turn a simple image of even the most familiar subject into a thing of beauty. A few hours later, with the bird directly illuminated by the unobstructed midday sun, the same shot is likely to be spoiled. Harsh shadows on the bird, the lack of a catchlight in the eye and reduced sharpness due to the shimmering haze of the warmest hours can severely reduce the quality of a bird photograph. It's not only the subject, either – backgrounds in such light will often have harsh, bright highlights and deep, dark shadows, creating contrast that draws the eye away from the subject and generates more distractions for the autofocus.

Wind is also often at its lightest early on, dropping again in the evening. This equates to still water when photographing birds in wetland habitats, stable branches that woodland- and scrub-dwellers will be happier to perch out on, as well as no





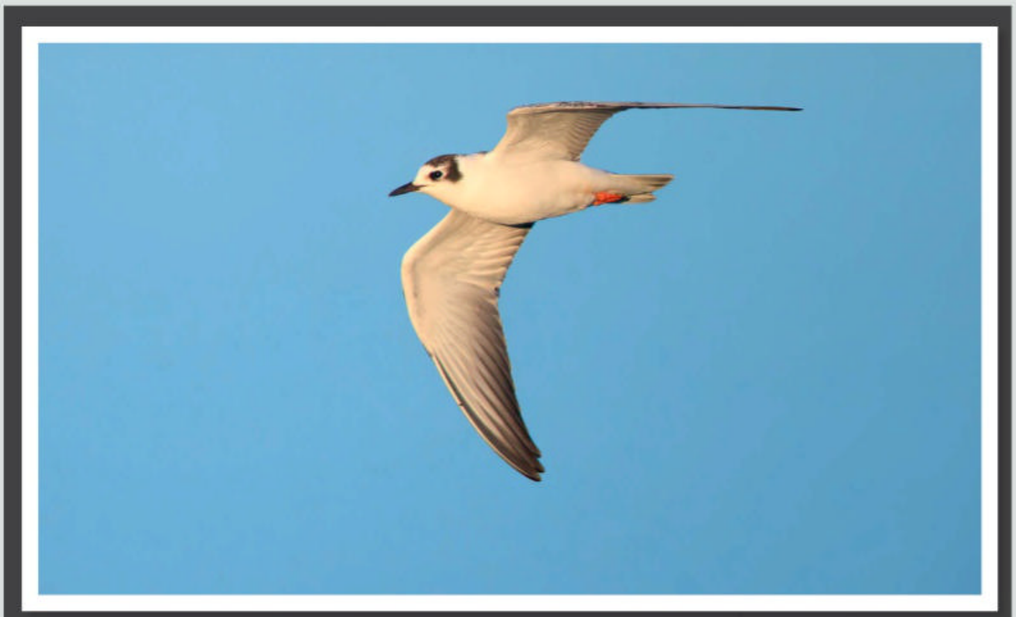
Two of the three Eurasian Dotterel images shown here were taken at around 3.30 pm in early May. Even at this time the light was quite harsh when the sun was out (image 2), creating shadows on the bird and no catchlight in the eye. The more neutral light during the occasional patch of cloud cover helped improve the images considerably (image 3). However, waiting a few hours for the evening light was worthwhile (image 1), with the bird also becoming much more active and moving to a flatter, more open area which had been busy with dog walkers and cyclists earlier in the day.

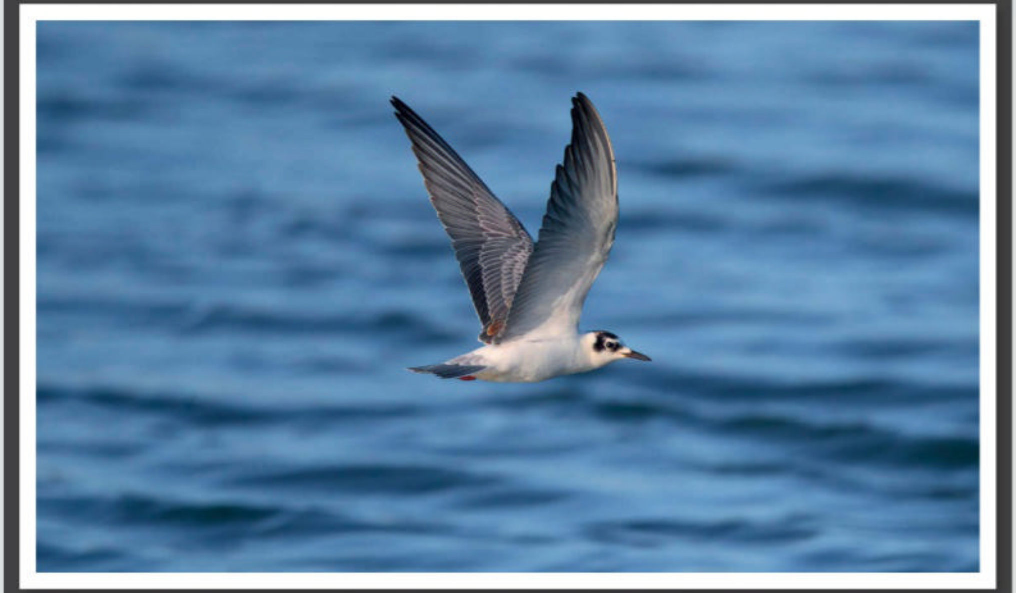
ruffled plumage and displaced feathers! Without the rustle of vegetation, it's also easier to hear birds and spot their movement.

Birds often choose to be more visible and active early and late in the day. Behaviour that can make for great photos, such as singing and displaying, is often concentrated into these times. Human disturbance is also much lower, especially first thing in the morning. Birds are more likely to be close to paths and roads early in the day before the crowds emerge and force wildlife into more secluded spots. As the saying goes, the early bird catches the worm ... and the early bird photographer is best placed to get the shot!

Can you ever shoot when the sun is high? With some cloud cover, or in cooler, entirely shaded habitats like deep forest, you can of course get good bird photos at this difficult time of the day. Also, given the climate in the UK, we often don't have much choice but to photograph birds in suboptimal light. With rare and scarce visitors in particular, we simply have to do the best we can in the conditions. Some subjects, such as raptors, also tend not to emerge until later in the morning as they wait for the thermals or their prey to get going. There's not much point going out at the crack of dawn to photograph Eurasian Hobbies hunting dragonflies, for example!

As a general rule, though, when you're out with the camera on a sunny and calm morning or evening, your chances of taking great bird photos improve significantly. ***Kit Day***





The perfectly still water of a lake provided a lovely background for this juvenile White-winged Tern first thing in the morning (upper photo), with the lack of distracting ripples making it easier for the autofocus to stay on the bird. Just an hour later, a slight breeze had changed the images completely (lower photo).

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PHOTO TARGET … JULY

Northern Gannet

KIT DAY

JULY can be one of the quietest months for bird photography in the UK. Adult birds are often scruffy after several months dedicated to breeding. Fledged juveniles are much smarter-looking birds at this time of year.

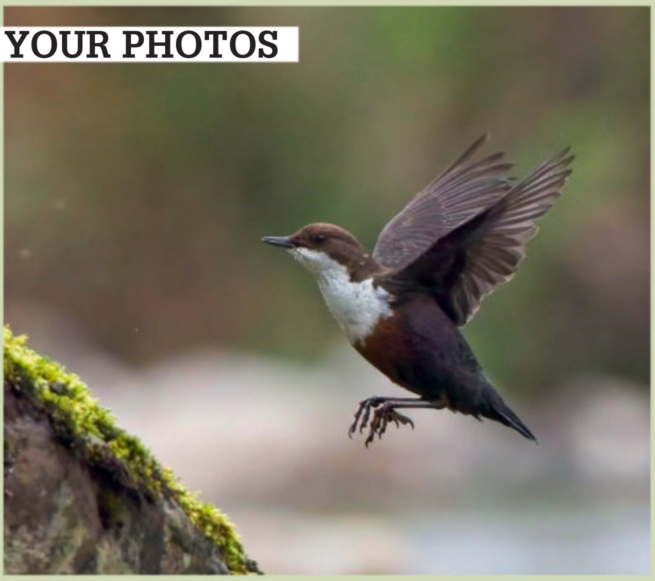
A trip to one of Britain's seabird cities makes for a great day out this month. There is lots of activity at colonies throughout July, although most Guillemots and Razorbills will depart this month. Where present, Northern Gannets tend to dominate the scene. The UK is home to more than half of the world population of these striking birds, and they provide an excellent subject for photography. There is plenty of interesting behaviour to observe, with pairs going through elaborate pair-bonding routines involving allopreening and 'sky pointing'. Many colonies allow amazing views of these birds up close so it's possible to isolate their heads for a striking image. There are always lots of comings and goings, providing plenty of flight-shot opportunities. Gannets will often will fail to land on their first attempt so tracking the same bird as it comes back around can be a good tactic.

Even in July some birds will be carrying nesting material. Depending on the wind direction, updraughts will allow the birds to hang in the air just above the clifftop, which also makes for an interesting image. There will be adults feeding youngsters to target, as well as squabbles between neighbours. At colonies in Orkney and Shetland there's always the chance of an image of a gannet being harried by a Great Skua.

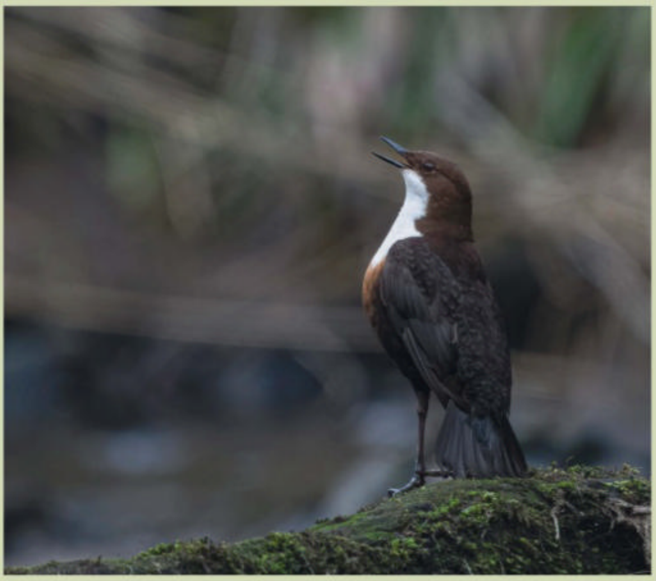
For a different perspective, you can also take a boat trip to photograph the birds from sea level at places like Bempton Cliffs RSPB, East Yorkshire, and Bass Rock, Lothian. Sometimes this can provide an opportunity for fantastic shots of gannets plunging into the water to feed.

Being bright white, Northern Gannet can be tricky to expose. Flying individuals can be against a pale sky one second and the darker sea the next, so this is a good opportunity to try out manual settings. This ensures that the bird is correctly exposed even when the metering (the camera's assessment of the exposure based on the light conditions according to your chosen metering system) of the scene changes. A zoom lens is ideal for gannets, with different focal lengths perfect for group shots, portraits and close-ups, as well as offering the flexibility to keep flying birds in the frame during those close encounters! Make sure you send your Northern Gannet shots to **editorial@birdwatch.co.uk** or upload to the BirdGuides gallery. ***Kit Day***

YOUR PHOTOS



JOHN WALKER



MICHAEL KELSO

Dipper

OUR June photo challenge was a popular one, with *Birdwatch* readers sending in plenty of high-quality Dipper photos in a wide range of different settings. We've chosen two particularly striking images to be featured here, by John Walker and Michael Kelso.

John's submission of a bird in flight stood out for being so sharp, with the Dipper eyeballing the camera as it lands on a mossy rock. We felt this image really captured the essence of Dipper's dynamic daily life in its riverine habitat.

Given the species' rather dumpy form, it's unusual to see Dipper looking as sleek as the bird in Michael's photo. Cropped nicely, this image of a singing Dipper is sharp and is exposed well; it would be easy to burn out the whites on an otherwise dark bird.

IN THE GARDEN

When the sun goes down

Some 2,500 species of moths are native to the UK. Using a light trap in your garden is a great way to find out which species are present. This is a Small Ranunculus, which is increasing its UK distribution.

IF you've ever harboured a desire to delve into the world of recording the wildlife in your garden, besides just the birds, then July is a great month to consider doing so. In particular, this is the perfect time of year to think about trying moth trapping for the first time, with a greater abundance and diversity of species on the wing this month than during any other.

In a previous role as a head gardener at a private house in Surrey, one night of moth trapping in the garden using three traps produced an impressive 175 species. But even in a modest-sized garden, you may be surprised by what you find. Someone once said that every day with a moth trap is like Christmas Day. As you open it in the morning, it's incredibly exciting to see what goodies might be lurking!

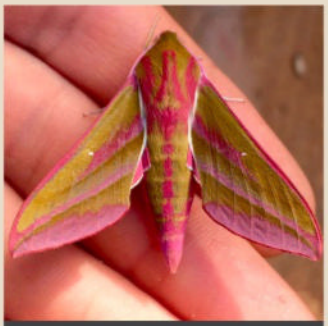
Moth traps come in all shapes and sizes these days and are easily available to order online. Anglian Lepidopterist Supplies is a particularly well known and reliable supplier (**www.angleps.com**). Perhaps the most familiar design is the Skinner trap, which consists of a simple box and a sloped lid of glass or clear Perspex with a gap in the middle beneath the lightbulb fitting. Moths are attracted to the light and then funnelled down into the box, where a bundle of egg cartons offers somewhere for them to spend the night, so they're ready for you to uncover in the morning before releasing them. Skinner traps are easy to build yourself – I made mine from an old table.

In terms of lighting, the traditional option is a mercury vapour bulb, which is extremely bright and requires a ballast box in order to slowly fire it up (otherwise you will blow your electrics). Alternatively, you can use a blacklight or actinic bulb, both of which still attract plenty of moths but are rather less offensively bright – especially good if you live in a built-up area and want to remain friends with your neighbours! An even simpler option is to hang a white sheet up somewhere in your garden and position the light next to it, although this only really works for 'live mothing' rather than trapping, as there is nothing to stop the moths from flying away again or getting eaten by opportunistic birds.

On that subject, do make sure you get up early in the morning to either empty your trap or cover it with a blanket, to stop all the moths escaping or being snaffled by a hungry European Robin! Also be sure to scatter the moths in different areas in the garden when you release them, again to stop them all being eaten straight away, as your resident birds will otherwise quickly become wise to this easy food source.

Moths are an excellent indicator of the ecological health of your garden and the surrounding landscape. Did you know that there are more day-flying moth species in the UK than there are butterfly species? Studies have also shown that moths are more prolific and efficient pollinators than butterflies and other insects.

MATT PHELPS



Not all moths are brown! This is an Elephant Hawk-moth.

THIS PHOTO: MATT PHELPS; ABOVE: JOSH JONES

Planting willowherb will encourage Elephant Hawk-moth into your garden. The caterpillar resembles an elephant's trunk.

Once your moth trap is fired up you will potentially attract all sorts of species from across the wider area, including passing migrants, but you will certainly see a bias towards the species that live on the particular trees and plants in the immediate vicinity. If you want to catch Oak Beauty, December Moth or Merveille du Jour, for example, you need oak nearby. If you have willowherbs or fuchsias in or near your garden, you may be lucky enough to catch the gorgeous Elephant Hawk-moth in July.

Record everything you catch and upload it to iRecord. All the data will help county and national recorders to build up a better picture of the moth population in your area, but you can also use it to help plan what future improvements you might like to make to the plant diversity in your garden – especially as we get towards the end of the growing season and start to think about next year. ***Matt Phelps***

ON THE PATCH

Birders' autumn

ED STUBBS

Black-tailed Godwits heading south from Iceland will be on the move during July, sometimes in large flocks, with many birds still wearing their resplendent brick-red breeding plumage.

IF June feels too early to declare autumn, there's no denying that it's underway in July. Non-birders may be rather baffled at the idea of it being autumn during this month, but plenty of birds are moving back south now. The trickle of migrants gradually increases as the month progresses, including a variety of shorebirds, with terns and gulls finishing breeding too. Passerines will start moving around as well, at least locally or regionally – July isn't too early for a Pied Flycatcher or Wood Warbler to be working its way back south.

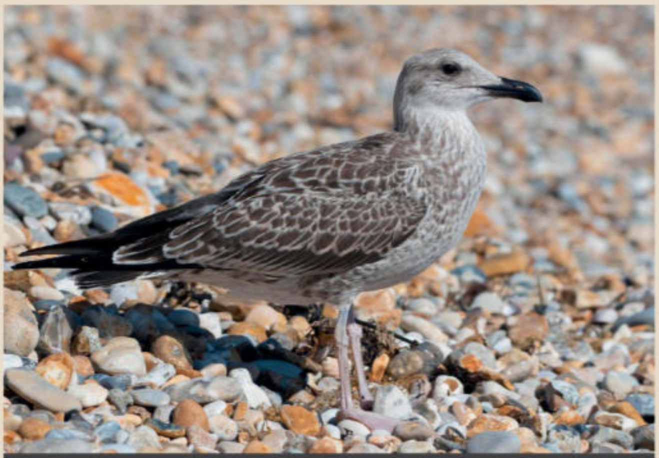
This is a good month for gulls. Yellow-legged and Caspian Gulls on the Continent fledge earlier than British-breeding large gulls, so early July is an ideal time to start looking out for juveniles as they begin to disperse. In the south and east, any juvenile gull is worth perusing as it may be a Yellow-legged; Caspian tends to turn up later in July. Check any loafing large gull flocks; a bit of bread can be useful to entice birds closer. Smaller gulls such as Mediterranean, Black-headed and Common are also dispersing and high counts can be recorded away from breeding colonies – it's a good opportunity to collect darvic-ring data which provides valuable information on movements.

By mid-July many young terns should have fledged and birds begin congregating on beaches, in fishing flocks offshore, and inland on lakes and reservoirs. I always look forward to the autumn tern flocks on my patch. Every day is different with new birds dropping in, although the high levels of disturbance on the beach in summer can be frustrating. Roseate Tern is perhaps the main prize and non-breeding or failed-breeding birds can be picked out away from colonies. It is rare, though, and the effects of bird flu will likely make it an even trickier species to find away from its few strongholds. Indeed, it remains to be seen what impact bird flu will have on breeding birds this year. Alas, as I type, Black-headed and other gulls are suffering badly, with species like Common Tern also impacted. Sadly, it's possible that the post-breeding dispersal and winter flocks could be much reduced this year and in future.

By mid-month wader action is well underway, with species returning or passing through including Black-tailed Godwit, Dunlin, Little Ringed Plover, Common and Green Sandpipers and Greenshank. Particularly near the end of July, juveniles of these species will be embarking on their first migration – such birds can often be very tame. One subspecies to look out for is *limosa* Black-tailed Godwit, which breeds in the UK and continental Europe (unlike most of our wintering godwits, which are Icelandic breeders). The juveniles look rather smart and appear well before young Icelandic godwits.

Another species that could be on the move is Crossbill, moving earlier than most finches. Some years, like in 2020, there are irruptions with large numbers of birds moving. It has been a poor couple of years since, so perhaps we're due another big autumn for them. The first warblers will also be on the move. From mid-month, smart lemon-yellow Willow Warblers may be encountered – really great-looking birds. Scarcer species such as Grasshopper and Wood Warblers may be picked out by a lucky observer.

Amy Robjohns



ED STUBBS

July is an excellent time to go seeking out juvenile Yellow-legged Gulls, especially if you live in south or east England.

AMY ROBJOHNS

The first waves of passerine migration get underway from mid-month. Grasshopper Warbler is among the early possibilities.

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BUILDING KNOWLEDGE

On the right track

A new project called DiverLog is assessing the impact that offshore windfarms might have on the feeding of wintering Red-throated Divers off the coast of Germany. One of the tagged birds migrated to Siberia.

A study to look at the effects of windfarms on Red-throated Divers has produced some startling results. The DiverLog project is assessing the impact that offshore windfarms might have on the feeding of wintering Red-throated Divers off the coast of Germany. The first birds were caught in spring 2022 at their resting area in the German North Sea and fitted with GPS dataloggers which monitor their movements and feeding patterns, including dive depth. Then they were tracked as they migrated back to their breeding areas, mainly to Russia, but also to Scandinavia, and afterwards on their autumn migration to moulting and wintering areas.

The results, from 13 tracked birds, showed that one of them migrated to the Taymyr Peninsula in Siberia and then back to North Sea, where it migrated along the Dutch coast before crossing to the Suffolk coast, where it was last noted in December 2022. Another, which spent last winter off the coast of North Norfolk, came from Sibiryakov Island in the Kara Sea, Siberia. A third spent the summer off the north coast of Svalbard, in Arctic Norway, before flying directly to the waters off the Isle of Skye, Highland, then heading east across the Scottish mainland, along the coast of the Moray Firth, then down the east coast of Britain to winter off Great Yarmouth, Norfolk! Ringing recoveries and other tracking have suggested that many of the wintering birds off the British coast come from Scandinavia or European Russia, but not from so far north or east. More birds are being tagged this year and you can follow the fascinating tracking results at **www.divertracking.com**.

Seabirds are perhaps the most tracked group of birds as most of them are large enough to carry sophisticated satellite trackers. They are also one of the most threatened groups of birds and knowledge of their distributions is difficult to get any other way as they spend so much of their time at sea. An amazing database from BirdLife International, originally called Tracking Ocean Wanderers, has now been developed and improved to become the Seabird Tracking Database. The largest database of its kind, it contains data on 160 species from 433 colonies, with more than 45,000 tracks to follow, from albatrosses to storm petrels and from auks to terns, including a very impressive 28 gadfly petrel species and 27 larger petrel and shearwater species. Learn more at **www.seabirdtracking.org**.

Chris Harbard

BUILDING KNOWLEDGE

Second chances

THIS is the time of year when many birds have started or are thinking about a second brood. Some resident species which began breeding early, such as Blackbird, may already be on a third brood. Of our summer visitors, arriving later in the year means that there may only be time for one brood, but early arrivals such as Swallow and House Martin can often fit in a second. Some resident species only have one brood – Blue Tit is an example, and they have a large clutch of 10-12 eggs. The hatching of these is timed to coincide with a flush of caterpillars, which means more of a large brood might survive. A later brood would not have this advantage. There is evidence that climate change may favour multi-brooded resident bird species with nesting being able to start earlier, and with less chance of predation.

In order to have a second brood, parents must raise the first one and see them on their way quickly before starting again. In some species the female will begin brooding a second clutch, leaving the male to finish feeding the first youngsters. A second brood usually means just as much work as the first, sometimes more if food is not as plentiful. Songbirds will almost always build a new nest for the second attempt, but often within their already established territory. However, some species, such as Great Tit, will use a nestbox again and there are even cases of birds which lay a second clutch of eggs before the previous young have actually left the nestbox.

A recent study looked at 19 species of songbirds in North America. The results showed that in some species the young leave the nest early, with less well-developed wings than others and have a poorer chance of survival than those which leave later. The species which leave early were all open-nest breeders, which are more prone to predation than cavity nesters with well-developed young. The longer open-nesting species leave their young in the nests the greater the chance of losing the whole brood to a predator, while getting the young to leave early means a better chance of having a second brood.

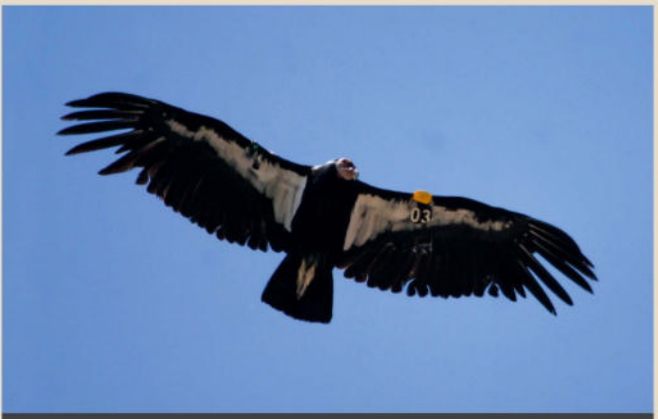
Chris Harbard

TONY CLARKE

Blue Tit is one species that only tends to have one brood.

ORNITHOLOGY

Behaviour-based management is key to avian reintroduction projects


PETER DEDICOAT

Exposure to conspecifics has been used to maintain natural behaviour in captive-bred California Condors before release.

RECENT studies have shown that captive-breeding projects will be key to the survival of some bird species over the next 200 years, prompting researchers from George Mason University, Virginia, to investigate which techniques are key in a successful reintroduction project.

After poring over 1,074 papers and articles, Jessica Roberts, a doctoral student at George Mason, and biology professor Dr David Luther picked out 91 avian translocation projects from the last 50 years and covering 15 taxonomic orders to help identify best practices for the conservation tool.

The projects analysed were chosen because they all had first-year survival data. The data revealed that exposing birds to food available in the wild before release, a behaviour-based technique, was crucial.

Dr Luther said: “Threatened and endangered species bred in zoos aren’t really prepared to go live in a wild circumstance with predators and forage for their own food. Everything’s given to them and they are protected.”

Other behavioural-based techniques were identified as having been beneficial to some species. Captive-bred California Condors were exposed to adults of their own species in order to encourage more natural behaviour before release, while Puerto Rican Amazons have been taught to recognise predators before they are released.

They also found that successful projects initially released birds into a protected area within the species’ natural habitat. A period of acclimatisation to the release site and the provision of supplemental food resources after release were also identified as important factors in bird reintroduction projects.

Roberts said that the consideration of behaviour-based management is relatively new in the wildlife conservation toolkit and emphasised that this means a broad look at its implications is important before further research on a more precise scale.

She said: “I’ve worked in captive breeding and rearing endangered species and saw that a lot of the time when we released them back to the wild, we did not understand the mechanisms behind why some individuals were thriving and others perished. The main goal of this research was to look for answers to these survival questions.”

Roberts, who was due to graduate with her PhD in Environmental Science and Public Policy this May, hopes that the work will help inform future reintroduction and translocation projects, ultimately saving species from extinction in the decades and centuries to come.

Reference

Roberts, J L, and Luther, D. 2023. An exploratory analysis of behavior-based and other management techniques to improve avian conservation translocations. *Biological Conservation*. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.biocon.2023.109941

ORNITHOLOGY

Wind tunnel reveals surprising science behind long-distance migration

A team of US researchers has made a surprising discovery concerning the capabilities of long-distance migrant songbirds.

Migrating passerines, which make non-stop flights of more than 1,500 km between their breeding and wintering ranges, fuel themselves by burning lots of fat and a surprising amount of the protein making up lean body mass, including muscle, early in the flight.

This is in direct contrast to conventional wisdom, which had assumed that migrating birds only ramped up protein consumption at the very end of their journeys because they would need to use every ounce of muscle for wing-flapping, not fuel. The results of the work appeared recently in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*.

“Birds are amazing animals,” said Cory Elowe, the paper’s lead author and a postdoctoral researcher in biology at University of Massachusetts Amherst, where he received his PhD. “They are extreme endurance athletes; a bird that weighs half an ounce can fly non-stop for 100 hours at a time from Canada to South America. How is this possible? How do they fuel their flight?”

For a very long time, biologists assumed that birds fuelled such feats of endurance by burning fat reserves. And indeed, fat is an important part of migratory birds’ secret mix. “The birds in our tests burned fat at a consistent rate throughout their flights,” explained Elowe. “But we also found that they burn protein at an extremely high rate very early in their flights, and that the rate at which they burn protein tapers off as the duration of the flight increases.”

To make this breakthrough, Elowe had help from the bird banding operators at Long Point Bird Observatory in Ontario, Canada, along the northern shore of Lake Erie.

After capturing 20 Blackpoll Warblers and 44 Myrtle Warbler using mistnets, Elowe and his colleagues then transported the birds to the Advanced Facility for Avian Research at Western University, which has a wind tunnel built specifically for observing birds in flight.

Elowe measured the birds’ fat and lean body mass pre-flight, then, when the sun set, let the birds free in the wind tunnel. Because the birds naturally migrate at night, Elowe and his colleagues would then stay awake – at one point, in the case of a Blackpoll Warbler, for 28 hours – watching for when a bird would decide to rest. At that point, the researchers would collect the bird and again measure its fat and lean body mass content, comparing them with the pre-flight measurements.

The researchers still don’t know why the birds are burning such vast stores of protein so early in their journeys, but the possible answers open up a wide range of future research avenues.

Reference

Elowe, C R, Groom, D J E, Slezacek, J, and Gerson, A R. 2023. Long-duration wind tunnel flights reveal exponential declines in protein catabolism over time in short- and long-distance migratory warblers. *PNAS*. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2216016120

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Going global

Global Birdfair returns in July for its second edition, and this year's event promises to be bigger and better. Organisers *Tim Appleton MBE* and *Penny Robinson* offer a preview on what visitors can expect.

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One hundred thousand Euros

Global Birdfair is back. We hope that you are as excited as we are for this year's event and can come along to help 'Sustain Forest Life', this year's BirdLife International Project.

Our aim is to encourage and inspire people to enjoy and protect our natural world, covering a large range of interests and topics throughout the three days of the event on 14, 15 and 16 July.

Conservation organisations such as BirdLife International and the RSPB are among the first stands you will see. The latest optical and camera gear is available to try and buy – this is your chance to get great advice and find out just what suits your needs. Booksellers and bird-food suppliers have their place alongside nature travel companies and destination specialists from around the world. The Puffin Marquee is full of surprises thanks to the amazing art exhibitors, many of whom will be painting this year's Global Birdfair mural over the weekend.

Bird records are increasingly vital for science and conservation, however you submit them. The popular bird-ringing demonstration will be in action and eBird will be based in Falcon Marquee. If you are a regular contributor or new to eBird recording, you can pop by the stand or join one of their workshops over the weekend.

This year, our three lecture stages – Avocet, Curlew and Plover – are being joined by two new additions: the Turnstone Authors' Stage and the Owl Workshop. Photography is always popular among birders and the Owl Workshop will be sharing some wisdom to help you get the most out of your camera gear.

The Osprey Events Stage is packed with entertaining presentations and quizzes as well as serious debate. Celebrities attending Global Birdfair include Iolo Williams (who is taking to the Osprey Stage on Saturday evening with Nick Baker), Mark Carwardine, Mike Dilger, Simon King, David Lindo, Nigel Marven and Jonathan and Angela Scott. All will be in action on the various stages over the weekend, so make sure you bag your seat in good time. Friday evening's entertainment will be the fun 'A Year In Birdsong' with Ajay Tegala, who is bringing his show to the Osprey Stage. Catering and the bar will remain open until 9 pm on Friday and Saturday evenings so you can sit and relax after a full day at the event.

There's also a bonus for younger visitors this year. Not only do under-18s gain free entry to the event with a paying adult, but all youngsters will receive a free copy of our great new book, *Be a Global Birdfair Expert*, which will guide them around the event with plenty of entertaining tasks and challenges.

Be sure to check out the information boards on site, which will give daily updates on activities and events taking place at Global Birdfair. Programmes can be pre-ordered with your ticket for collection on arrival, so you can plan your day or weekend.

We look forward to welcoming you to Global Birdfair 2023 and hope you will be left feeling inspired and empowered by your visit. ■

Further information

- Global Birdfair takes place on 14, 15 and 16 July at Rutland Showground, Oakham (LE15 7TW).
- The show is open from 9 am-5.30 pm daily, plus Friday and Saturday evening events.
- Catering and bar open until 9 pm. Free parking; camping and glamping available.
- Tickets cost £14 for an adult day pass or £38 for an adult three-day pass (FREE for under-18s).
- Find out more at **www.globalbirdfair.org.**

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Successful restoration

STEPHEN Waters's letter regarding aftercare service from optics manufacturers (*Birdwatch* 371: 67) struck a chord with me. As mentioned by him, Swarovski Optik does have an excellent reputation in this area, but I have been astounded by the service I received from Leica recently.

I returned my 8x20 binoculars to them as they had become very stiff in the bridge, and similarly rigid in the eyecups. I received regular email updates as my 'bins' progressed through Leica's system and when they were dispatched to the main service centre in Portugal. They were returned after a full service had been completed, and they now look and work like new.

Did I mention they also sent me a new high-quality leather case (current value of approximately £100) to keep the binoculars in? Did also I mention my binoculars were 16 years old? Did I also mention there was no charge for any of the work done? How about that for customer service?! ***Colin West, via email***

Lesser seen

FOLLOWING your recent feature on Lesser Spotted Woodpecker I was reminded of my first experience of finding one in Dulwich, south-east London, in the early 1990s. I heard that a good place to find them was in the large rhododendron bushes in Dulwich Park (which were a favourite of King George V's wife, Queen Mary). I thought this unlikely but on a sunny day I took a book to read and sat nearby just in case. To my surprise, within a few minutes a 'Lesser Spot' appeared a few feet from me. Subsequently, I used to see them quite often in Sydenham Woods – I wonder if they are still present there. Encouraged by your article I recently went to Tudeley Woods RSPB near my home in Sevenoaks, Kent, where they are known to be present. Again, I was fortunate as I heard the distinctive drumming and was rewarded with a sighting of a confiding male. ***Edward Scott, via email***

To tick or not to tick?

THANK you to Richard Bonser for good coverage of some of the dilemmas birders can face. My first twitch was for a Ring-necked Duck in 1976 when I was 14, so no problems with memory. After doing quite a bit of twitching, with plenty of insurance added, I decided to stick to the BOU area and not twitch Ireland – although I treat the Isle of Man as Britain, until I see another Calandra Lark!

My two big divergences from the BOU list have come in recent years. First off, DNA and the invasion of Amur Stonechats in autumn 2016. It's a distinctive species but no DNA was obtained for the Donna Nook bird I saw on 7 October 2016, so in view of BBRC guidance, it was not submitted. Graham Catley's photos in the *Lincolnshire Bird Report 2016* show all the features and it's on my list.

The second regards former breeders that have been reintroduced. I feel Great Bustards on Salisbury Plain have been given a rough ride by the birding powers that be, unlike White-tailed Eagle, Common Crane, Red Kite, Corncrake and so on. As soon as I saw them breeding free and wild on Salisbury Plain in 2020, I put them on my list. I dipped on the Kent bird in 1978 and heard about the Norfolk birds too late in 1987. Actually, I saw the Kent bird but it was a lump in a field through a scope at dusk a mile away and I decided it wasn't a tickable view.

Controversially, I subscribe to the view that these birds probably came from the German reintroduction scheme and are no different to the Wiltshire birds in status. Sour grapes most will say, especially my mates who saw the 1978 bird well. Ultimately your own list is down to your own conscience.

By the way, all birders should visit the Great Bustard Group (GBG) and have a look around Salisbury Plain on public bridleways and form their own view. Make sure you give GBG a donation while you're there!
Phil Espin, via email

I keep lists for my own satisfaction, and I'm not in competition with anyone. All the same, I try to apply the same standards. Should we list Common Pheasant and Red-legged Partridge at all, given that their populations are continually being topped up by releases, and then culled by shooting? Personally, I only list species that I have seen properly. So, two species I have only heard (Corncrake and Eurasian Scops Owl) aren't on my list. No logical reason, it's just that I don't get the same satisfaction from hearing a bird as from seeing it. ***Richard Abernethy, via email***

IT was a good overview from Richard Bonser that raised plenty of questions. One he left out is yet to arise properly, but it will do soon: records of birds coming over from established feral populations on the Continent, such as Bar-headed Goose and African Sacred Ibis. And then there are our own exotics creeping up into attention, with some even seeking out Indian Peafowl flocks that might end up tickable! Personally, I have no interest in ever ticking either category, nor do I seek out introduced birds on Western Palearctic birding trips. ***Steve Lister, via email***

UK extinction on the cards?

TRULY wild Rock Doves are now limited to only a few locations across their historical European range. One of these is the Hebrides in Scotland. A recent article claims that even the Inner Hebrides are threatened by 'Feral Pigeons'. So why is there no law preventing the release of pigeons on these islands? One such example happened on Iona, where white doves regarded as symbols of peace were released into a large Rock Dove population!

On Iona I saw 10 Rock Doves with a white 'hybrid' feral-type bird. If that had been 10 Red Squirrels with one Grey Squirrel there would have been an outcry and threats of culling. But no one blinks an eye at Feral Pigeons and I feel that wild Rock Doves are doomed.
John Miles, via email

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■ **Skull school** How much do you know about birds' skulls? Amy Schwartz provides an introduction to the anatomy of skulls and bills, and looks at some of the fascinating adaptations that have evolved.

■ **Field ID notes** This month's guide focuses on the rare and declining Aquatic Warbler, outlining how to find and identify this species in early autumn and separate it from the similar-looking Sedge and Moustached Warblers.

■ **A lasting legacy** A lifetime of recording means that birders have a vast bank of useful and important data stored in their notebooks. David Callahan ponders what we can do to maximise our contributions to science.

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PLUS: **topical comment from Lucy McRobert and Alan Tilmouth, the team at BirdGuides provides round-ups of June's rarity highlights from Britain, Ireland and the Western Palearctic, news, views and reviews, tips to enhance your birding skills and knowledge, and our expert panel answers your questions.**

August issue on sale 27 July 2023

LUCY MCROBERT

Description woes

When non-birders try to describe a bird they don't recognise, prepare for any outcome – common or rare – says our columnist.

There comes a point in any community where you earn a reputation, something you are associated with. No, not like that. On Scilly, I am known as 'seal girl'. As a Marine Mammal Medic, I am one of the people called upon to wrestle sick baby Grey Seals into bags and help the vet stick thermometers up their bums. This reputation has expanded, and I have assisted an injured Peregrine Falcon and a Short-eared Owl, two feral cats and assorted nestling passerines. Most recently, I was asked if I could stop a territorial Blackbird from attacking the owners of the flat on which it was nesting.

With so many amazing birders on Scilly, for years I avoided questions about identification. This has, worryingly, been changing of late. 'It was sitting on the fence and looked sort of yellow.' 'It was black and white and hopping along the ground.' 'Here is an indistinct smudge on my phone, what is it?' My only proven triumph was a cracking male Snow Bunting on St Agnes this spring, described by the owner of the Turk's Head and subsequently refound a few days later. But I feel the pressure rising. On Scilly, anything can happen. I'm going to mess this up at some point.

So, I cast out the net and asked birders for their stories of ID woe. Everyone has them. The moment you pick up your binoculars, you will be bombarded with elaborate descriptions asking for help. There's a famous one from the RSPB where someone reported a bird with red on its head feeding on the bird table. European Robin. No, it's feeding on the bird table while standing on the ground. Eh? It turned out to be a Common Crane.

One county recorder recounts a chap who got in touch about a Eurasian Dotterel in his back garden in Widnes: a plump bird with a chestnut body with some white speckling, white stripe above the eye and brownish cap, short dark bill, longish yellowish legs. Yes, that does sound like a dotterel, except: it's running in and out of the greenhouse. It turned out to be an escaped Northern Bobwhite. Another phoned to report a large, white-chested bird with dark brown wings in her garden, sat next to her fishpond. A sparrowhawk perhaps, but no, she was adamant it was the size of a Labrador. It turned out her garden was an acre in size, the pond was a lake, and it was an Osprey.

ANDREJ CHUDY

A Eurasian Dotterel reported as running around a garden to a county recorder transpired to be a Northern Bobwhite (pictured).

> "Fledgling European Robins become Twite, Common Swifts become 'baby falcons', Common Buzzards are almost always Golden Eagles, and Tufted Duck is easily mistaken for Smew"

A lot of the time, the internet is to blame. Fledgling European Robins become Twite, Common Swifts become 'baby falcons', Common Buzzards are almost always Golden Eagles, and Tufted Duck is easily mistaken for Smew. There are lots of descriptions of supposed parrots that turn out to be anything but parrots; apart from when your friend, who has recently moved to London, is complaining about the loud green birds outside her window. They are indeed Ring-necked Parakeets. Hoopoes are reported at a worrying frequency, although half the time they've been photographed in Greece. Occasionally people strike gold, and uncover something rare, like the Green Heron in Pembrokeshire (found by an MP in 2018) or the American Robin in Sussex in early 2022, which was initially seen by a birder's partner.

Often, birds are exactly as described. 'It was a smallish black bird'. Blackbird. 'It looks like a crow.' Crow. Bill Oddie famously said that puzzling birds were almost always Jays, but I'm inclined to agree with Tom from Twitter: 81% of the time it's a leucistic Blackbird. In these circumstances, it is imperative to respect a learning process for people who are not familiar with birds. I will never laugh at anyone who asks me a birding question, although I will desperately wish they had asked someone who knew what they were talking about.

My favourite story by far was a polite exchange between a birder, acting in a professional but unnamed capacity, and a woman who was convinced she had photographed a dead juvenile Common Kingfisher. After several painfully courteous yet argumentative emails, the woman finally concluded, in line with the consensus, that this was in fact a bag of dog poo hanging from the tree. I would laugh, but birders on Scilly once stared for hours at a motionless Common Nighthawk, only to discover it was a cowpat. You see? We all make mistakes. ■

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57

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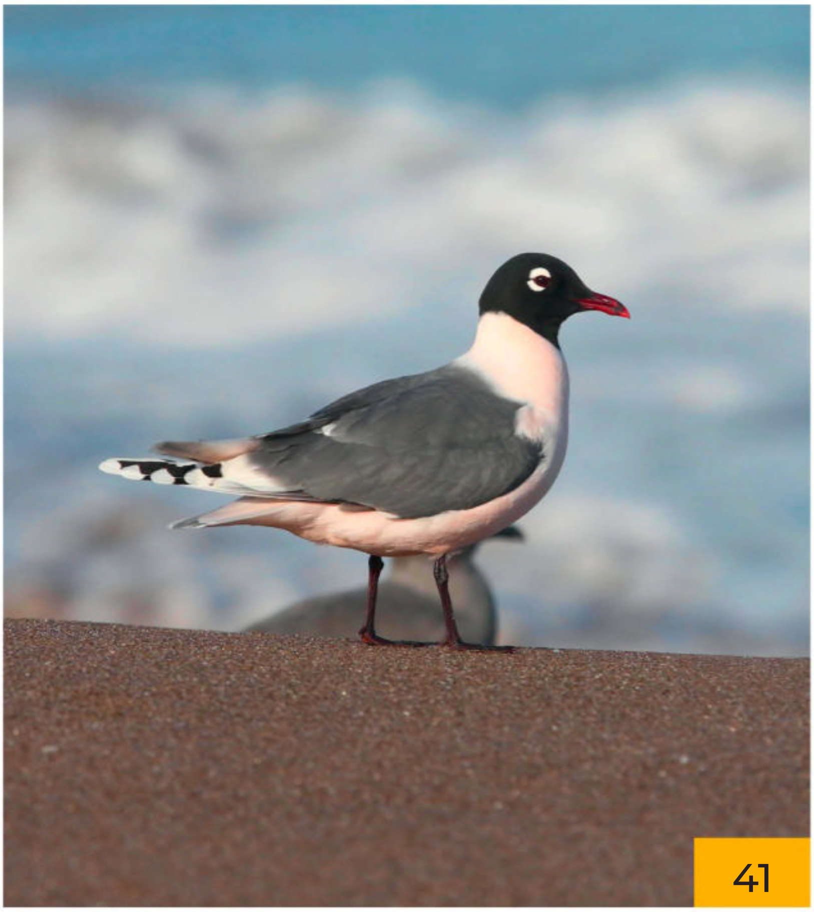
41

RICH BONSER

Contents

TERNS, GULLS, SKIMMERS

Orange-billed terns....5
Black, White-winged and Whiskered Terns....13
Common, Arctic and Roseate Terns....21
Black-headed and Bonaparte's Gulls....27
Little, Black-headed and Bonaparte's Gulls....34
Laughing and Franklin's Gulls....41
Slaty-backed Gull....49
Common, Ring-billed and European Herring Gulls....57
Caspian Gull....68
Yellow-legged Gull....79
Glaucous and Iceland Gulls....91
Iceland and Kumlien's Gulls....100

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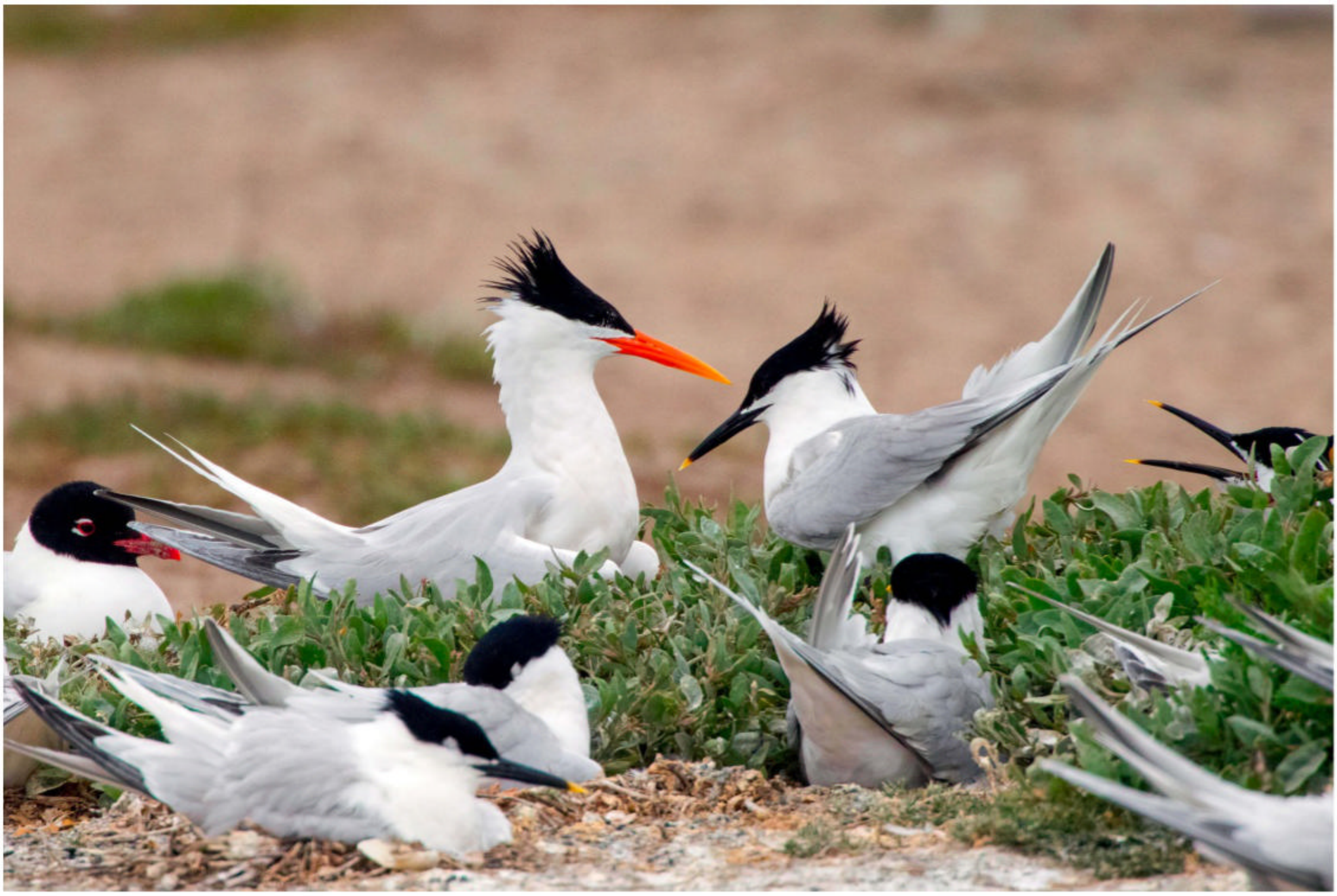
JOSH JONES

Orange-billed terns

Words by Paul Dufour and Pierre-André Crochet



DAVID MONTICELLI (WWW.AGAMI.NL)

ONE: Adult Elegant Tern (Noirmoutier Island, France, 25 May 2015). With its reddish-orange bill, paling towards the tip, Elegant Tern rarely goes unnoticed in a colony of Sandwich Terns. The colour and shape of the bill stand out as important features in the identification of orange-billed terns, but these vary more in Elegant than is usually appreciated and some individuals do not differ from Lesser Crested Tern in that aspect. Elegant, however, shows a very similar mantle colour to Sandwich Tern, which is an important feature to check when confronted with a vagrant in Europe; in Lesser Crested, the mantle is typically darker than Sandwich. The often-quoted longer crest with shaggy nape is not always striking, but the white rump – a diagnostic feature to separate Elegant from Lesser Crested Tern – is clearly visible here.

Elegant, Lesser Crested, West African Crested and Royal Terns – collectively known as the 'orange-billed terns' – are all possible vagrants to Britain and Ireland. But their very rarity and their similarity to each other make picking one out difficult. Add hybrids and Cayenne Tern into the mix and recognising any one of these species is even more challenging. Paul Dufour and Pierre-André Crochet provide all the in-depth information you need to identify these tricky terns if you're lucky enough to find one.

Basic Principles

Terns are known to undertake some of the most spectacular migratory journeys in the animal kingdom. These movements make them more likely to stray and be observed far from their normal ranges.

Recent genetic research has recently redefined the boundaries between a group of species commonly referred to as the 'orange-billed' terns, of the genus *Thalasseus*. We discuss here the identification of species which have either already been observed in Britain or which could likely appear here.

Elegant Tern

This species breeds on the west coast of North America, from southern California to Baja California, Mexico, mainly on Isla Rasa in the Gulf of California, which hosts more than 90% of the world's breeding population. Outside the mating season, it is distributed along the Pacific coast of America as far south as Chile. Slightly larger than Sandwich Tern, it has a long, dagger-shaped, orange bill (varying from yellowish-orange to reddish-orange), being deepest in colour at the base. In flight, the rump is white.

Occasionally occurring on the east coast of the USA, Elegant Tern was first observed in Europe in a Sandwich Tern colony in France in 1974. Since then, it has been seen almost annually in Europe, with about 20 individuals involved, many of which return to the same Sandwich Tern colonies for many years and have hybridised with the latter on several occasions. Since 2009, a minimum of eight Elegant Terns have been breeding near Valencia, Spain, either in mixed pairs with Sandwich Terns or as pure pairs, producing seven pure juveniles.

The identity of these birds has long been debated as it was suspected that they were hybrids with other orange-billed terns, as it seemed unlikely that several individuals of a species native to the Pacific would be present in the north-east Atlantic and Mediterranean areas. However, genetic analyses of samples from birds breeding in France and Spain have clarified their identity.

In Britain, the species has been observed on five occasions since 2002, the year of the first accepted record. That year three different individuals were seen, with one in 2005 and a ringed bird in 2017, the latter of which has regularly spent the summer in France since 2002. There are also six records from Ireland, the most recent of which was in September 2013.

Lesser Crested Tern

This Old-World tern has a wide distribution from North Africa to Oceania, including the Gulf of Arabia, northern Indian Ocean and South-East Asia from Sulawesi eastward. The closest populations to Britain breed in Libya, wintering along the coasts of northern and western Africa.

It is similar in size to Sandwich Tern and, in appearance, is a close match to Elegant Tern. However, the upperparts are generally darker than in the latter species and the bill tends to be straighter, paler yellowish-orange and more concolorous. Crucially, in flight, the rump is pale grey rather than white.

Rare in southern Europe, this species has been observed in Sandwich Tern colonies in Spain, France and Britain on several occasions. It was first recorded in Britain in 1982 and then annually until 1998. During these years, at least three birds were seen, including one that returned to the same Sandwich Tern colony on the Farne Islands, Northumberland, from 1984-1997, producing hybrid young in some years. Another was observed in East Anglia in summer 2005, but it hasn't been recorded since.

West African Crested Tern

This species breeds sporadically on the west coast of Africa from Mauritania to Guinea, sometimes further south. Outside the breeding period, it ranges from Morocco to Angola.

Superficially similar to Lesser Crested Tern, it is noticeably larger (between Lesser Crested and Caspian in size) and possesses a heavier bill, albeit with a similar yellowish-orange colour. After the breeding season, the head can be almost white in some individuals.

It is extremely similar in appearance to Royal Tern, and these two species were long considered conspecific. However, recent genetic analysis showed that it is actually more closely related to Lesser Crested than Royal Tern. These results prompted the International Ornithological Congress (and the Records Committee of the British Ornithologists' Union) to treat the two taxa previously lumped as Royal Tern as distinct species. This recognition should facilitate conservation measures for West African Crested Tern, whose world population is in serious decline.

It has so far not been definitively observed in Britain or Ireland, although a bird in Co Cork then Wales in 2009 is suspected to have been this species.

Royal Tern

Royal breeds widely in coastal USA, the Gulf of Mexico and Caribbean south to northern Atlantic-coast Brazil, with an austral population breeding from southern Brazil south to Argentina.

Extremely similar in appearance to the preceding African species, this tern averages a uniform, more reddish-orange bill which is thicker at the base and with the nostril closer to the base of the bill. The grey upperparts are also slightly darker, while its general shape is more reminiscent of a small Caspian Tern than Lesser Crested Tern.

Of the five records of 'Royal' Terns in Britain, two have been confirmed as this species by ringing recoveries (1979 in Glamorgan; 2017-present in the Channel Islands, France and Britain), with a third bearing a ring in Glamorgan in 1987 also presumably of American origin. In Ireland, a bird in Counties Mayo and Kerry in 2016 has not been formally accepted as such, but appears a typical example of this species according to Dufour and Crochet (2020).

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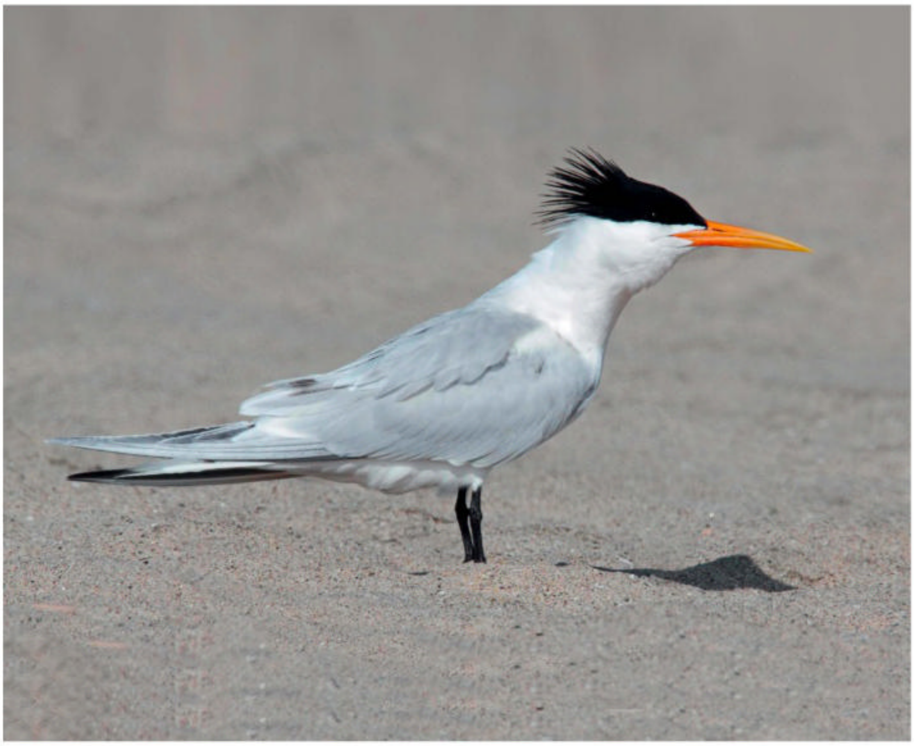
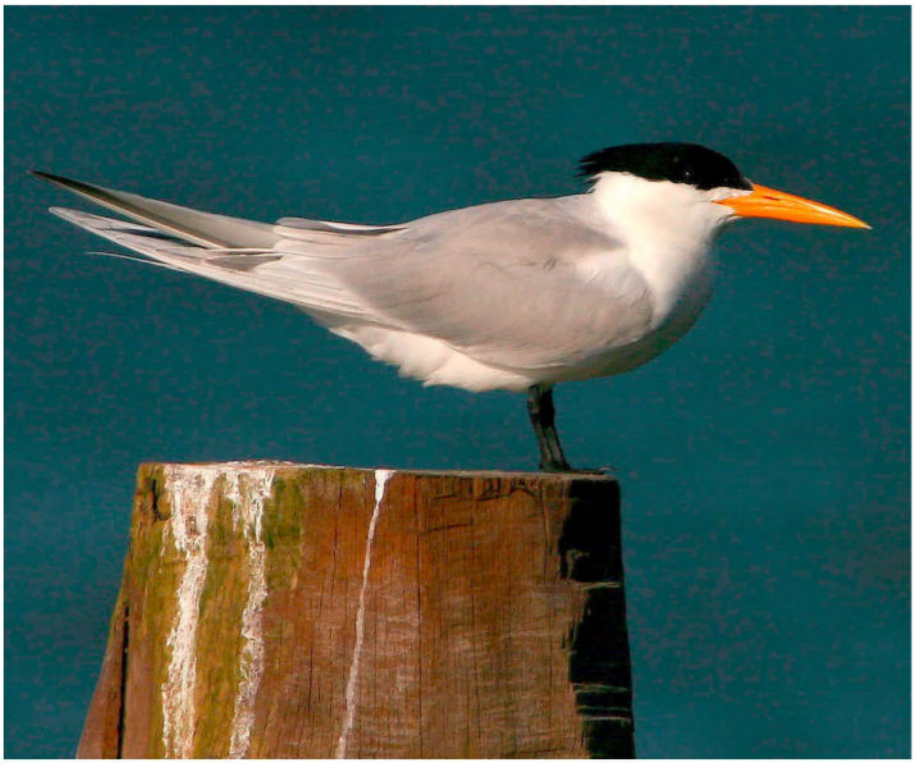


BRIAN E SMALL (WWW.AGAMI.NL)

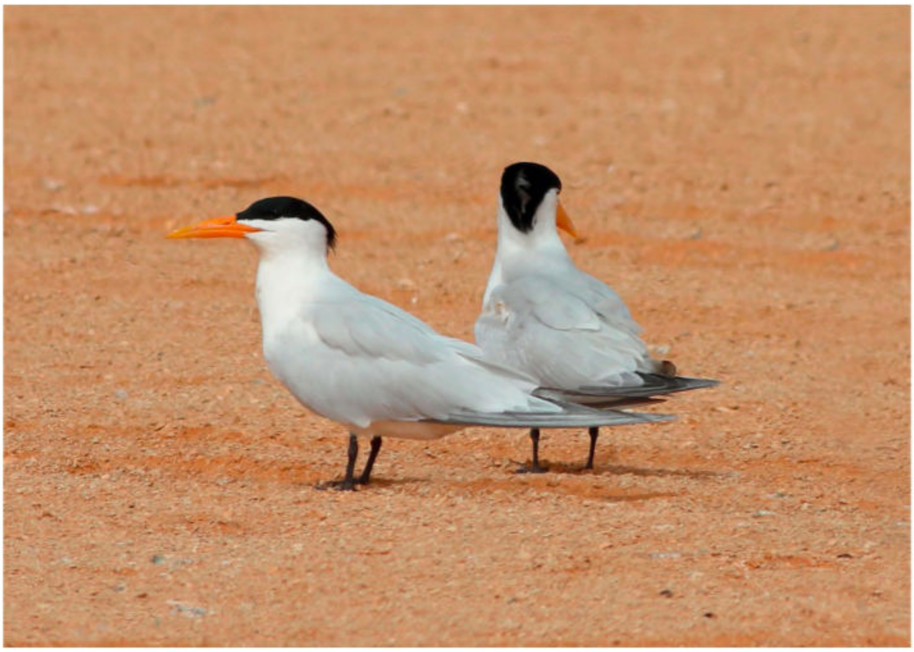
TWO: Adult Elegant Tern (California, USA, 8 May 2009). Bill shape and colour can vary considerably between individual Elegant Terns; compare this individual to that shown in image one. With its yellow-orange bill, this bird recalls Lesser Crested Tern. However, it shows a distinctive contrast between the deeper basal colour and the paler tip. In addition, the shape of the bill is also typical, as it tapers towards the tip, with the position of the gonys, sitting closer to the base of the bill than the tip, creating a drooping impression. The typically long feathers of the crest are obvious.



KIT DAY

THREE: Adult Lesser Crested Tern (Happisburgh, Norfolk, 18 July 2005). Lesser Crested Tern is similar in size to Sandwich Tern. It differs obviously from most Elegant Terns by its bill shape and colour, which is normally thicker at the base, straighter, and with a weak gonydeal angle positioned in the middle of the bill. Its colour is a uniform yellow-orange in breeding plumage, sometimes yellow (especially outside the breeding season), but individuals with the most vividly coloured bills overlap in colour with pale-billed Elegant Terns. On the ground, the mantle is obviously darker than in Sandwich Tern and this should allow the identification of most birds without checking the rump colour.

FOUR: Adult West African Crested Tern (Dakhla, Western Sahara, 28 March 2018). This species is larger – being between Lesser Crested and Caspian Terns in size – and possesses a heavier bill than both Elegant and Lesser Crested. However, a lone West African Crested can be confusingly similar to Lesser Crested or Royal Tern. This bird is relatively easy to tell apart from Royal, with its pale orange bill with a distinct contrast between a deeper basal colour and a paler distal portion. The bill shape is also distinctive, being thinner at the base and, most importantly, with a larger distance between the bill base and nostril compared to Royal.



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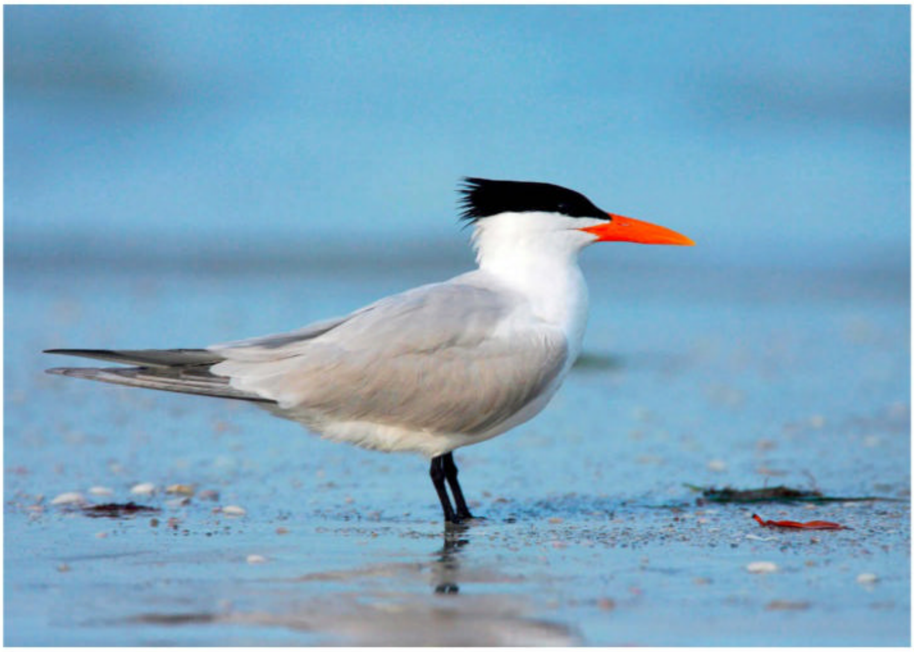
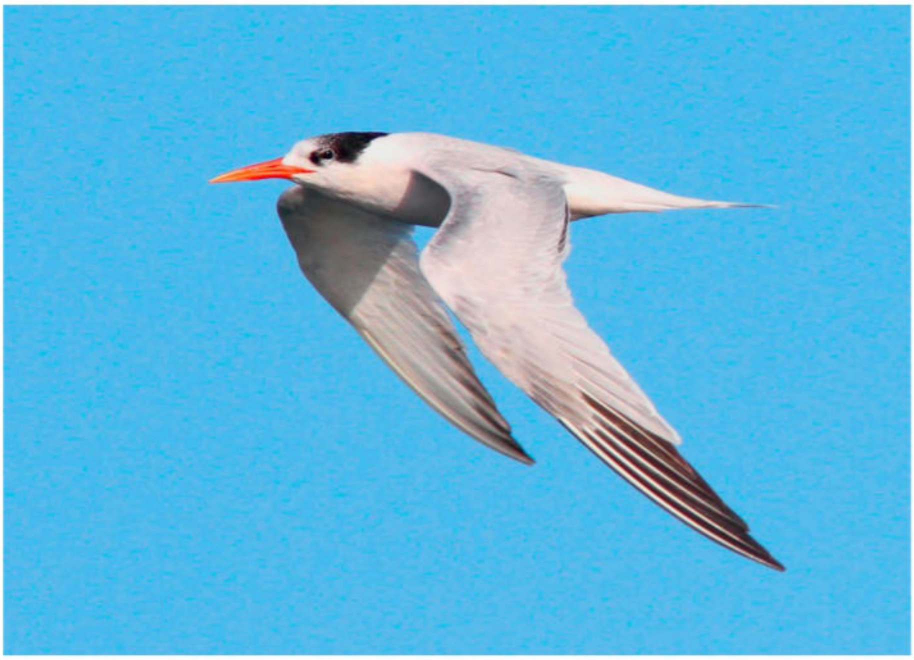
FIVE: Adult Royal Tern (Florida, USA, 7 April 2007). With its thick, reddish bill, this Royal Tern recalls Caspian Tern more than West African Crested. A typical Royal is larger with a more robust structure than West African Crested, a proportionally thicker bill, with a weaker gonydeal angle positioned further along the bill. The position of the nostril closer to the bill base is another important feature, but requires good-quality photos. The bill colour is often more uniform and redder, but never uniform yellow in adults.



BRIAN E SMALL (WWW.AGAMI.NL)

SIX: Non-breeding adult Elegant Tern (California, USA, 1 October 2016). All orange-billed terns lose their black cap outside the breeding season and exhibit a black mask. In Elegant Tern, the mask diffusively merges with the white forehead, it is also broader than in the other species and more continuous from the front of the eye to the nape. The combination of a long, thin, reddish bill with a white rump is also diagnostic of Elegant Tern.



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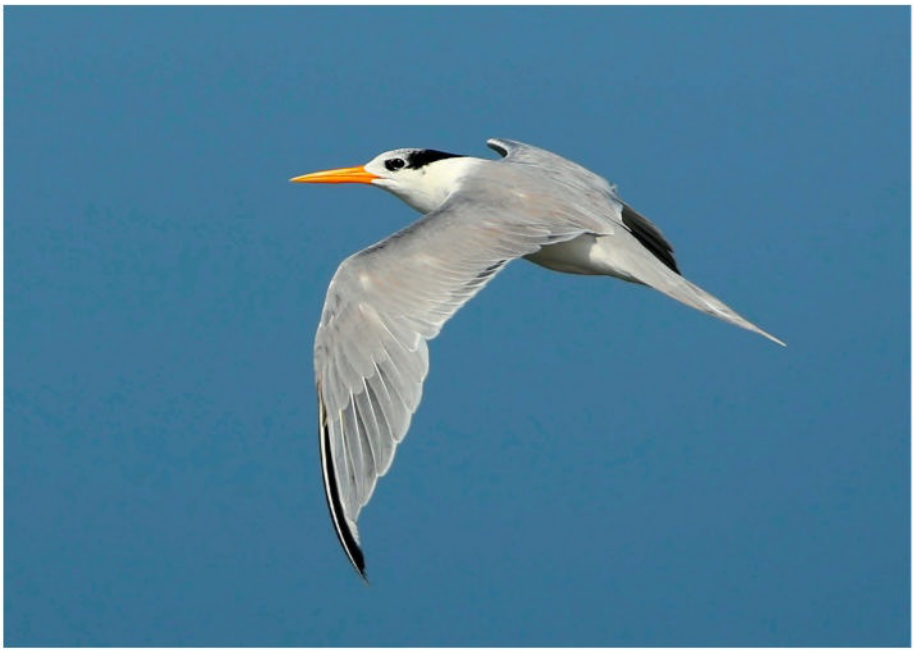
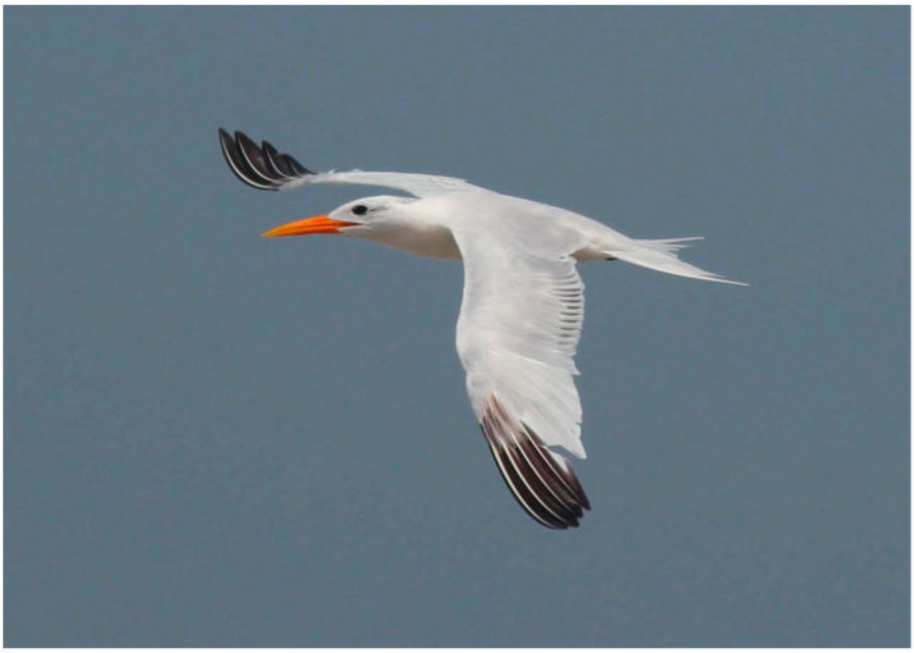
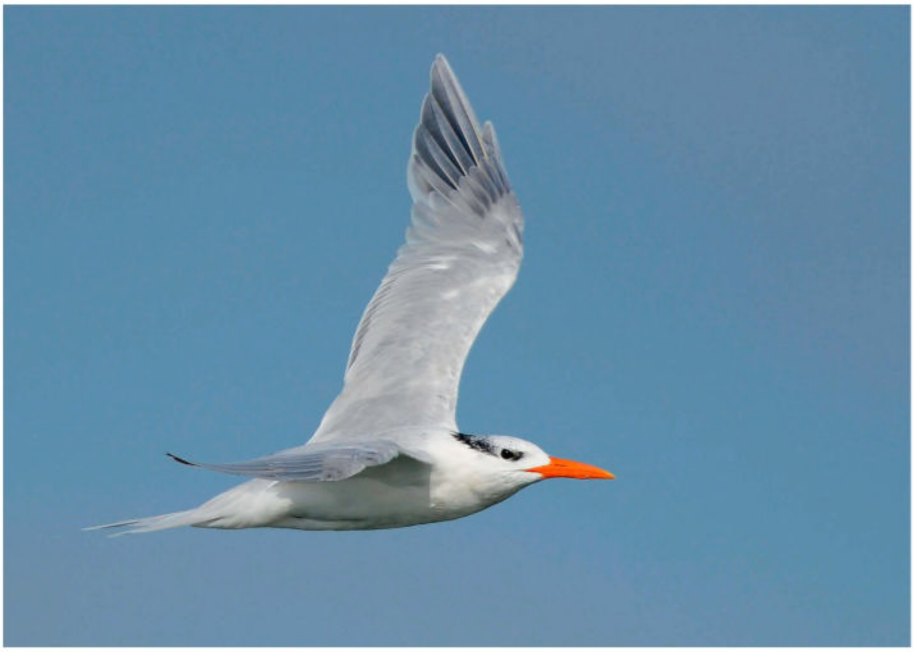

AURELIEN AUDEVARD

SEVEN: Non-breeding adult Lesser Crested Tern (Al-Seeb, Oman, 3 November 2015). This non-breeding individual could easily be mistaken for an Elegant Tern with a short and pale bill on the ground, but in flight the grey rump is diagnostic. Unlike most Elegant Terns, though, the bill is a uniform yellow-orange colour and the mask is often narrower and interrupted behind the eye. Note that Mediterranean birds, which are more likely to turn up in Europe, often look paler on the upperparts.

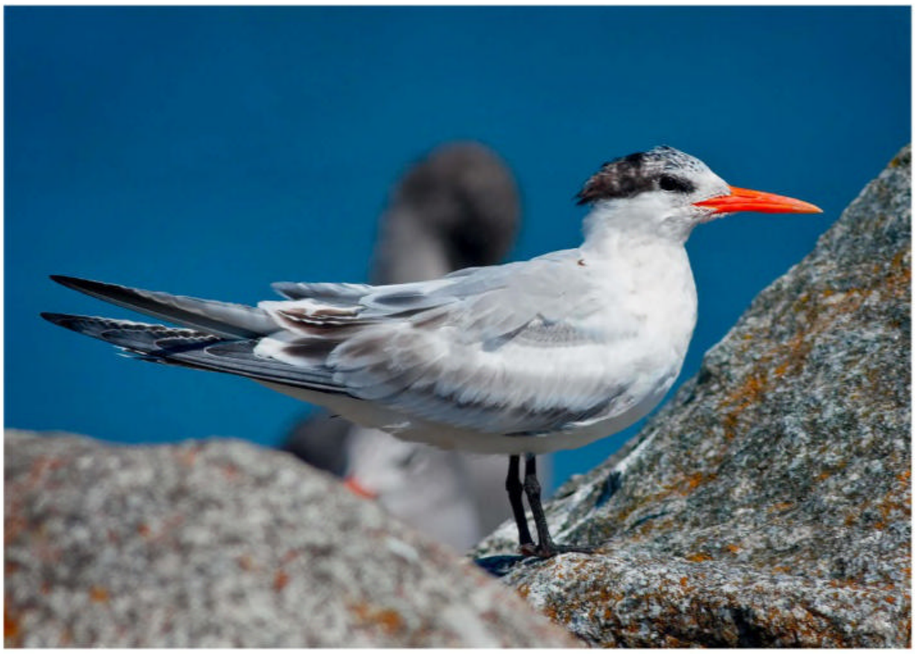

PAUL DUFOUR

EIGHT: Non-breeding adult West African Crested Tern (Akhfennir, Morocco, 8 September 2019). Immediately after the breeding season, this species can exhibit an almost completely white head, as in this bird. Further differences from Royal Tern include the very pale grey mantle (often of limited use, though) and the well-marked gonydeal angle. Note that the rump is usually pale grey, sometimes not much paler than the mantle.


RAY TIPPER

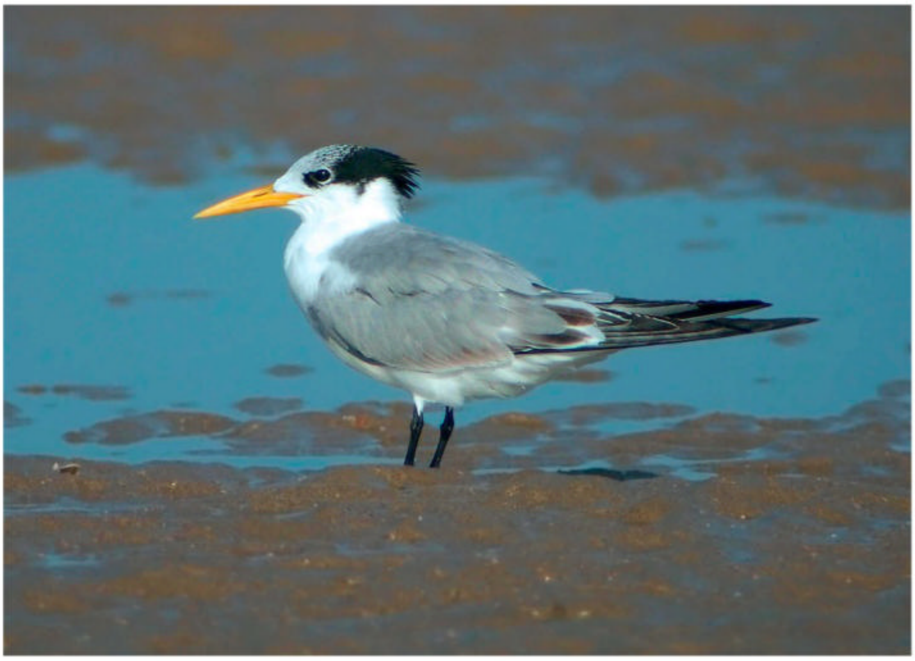
NINE: Non-breeding adult Royal Tern (Texas, USA, 14 November 2016). This is a typical non-breeding Royal Tern, with a thick and uniform-coloured orange bill. Note that dark-tipped tail feathers and the grey secondary bar can develop at all ages in most of the orange-billed tern species.

TEN: First-winter Elegant Tern (California, USA, 9 September 2007). First-winter birds in all 'crested' terns can easily be aged by the more extensive black mask, with a small notch behind the eye, which is often more diffuse than in adults, a short crest, and – most importantly – tertials, secondaries and often some wing coverts showing clear dark centres. The bill is often not fully grown (reaching full adult size in the second year) and identification may be more difficult. In this individual, the dark reddish-orange bill, which pales towards the tip, is diagnostic of Elegant.



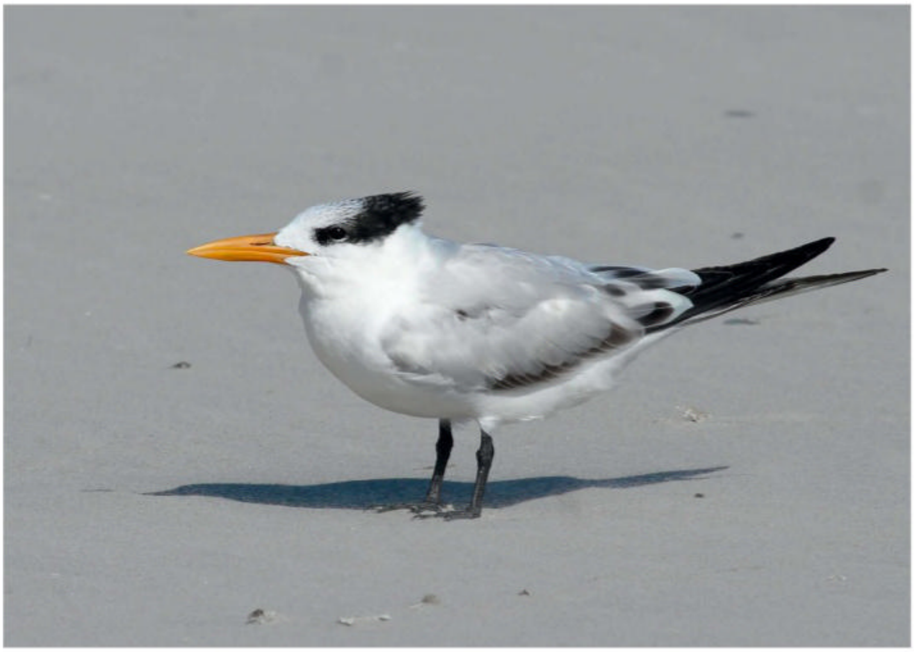
JULIAN HOUGH

ELEVEN: First-winter Lesser Crested Tern (Sur, Oman, 30 October 2004). This is a more advanced first winter, but with clearly visible retained juvenile tertials. The bill is short, narrow and uniformly greenish-yellow, which is diagnostic of Lesser Crested Tern, as are the comparatively dark grey upperparts.



AURELIEN AUDEVARD

TWELVE: First-winter Royal Tern (New Jersey, USA, 5 October 2011). Even though the rather pale yellow-orange bill colour is reminiscent of West African Crested Tern, the short and very thick shape, with the nostril very close to the bill base, are diagnostic of Royal Tern. The tertials are second generation – very fresh with broad white edges. Such second-generation tertials with well-defined dark centres are very rare in the similar African species.



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